



Confluence: The River Speaks

A series of visual art workshops with sound recording sessions taking inspiration from the River Wandle and its many (hi)stories, culminating in a permanent installation at the Ram Quarter Heritage Centre.



. ghosts of leaves > whispering reminding / prehistoric seascape the first blob of life / cracks through which light is lost / warping > playing through light > dancing > intertwining around / a blue image of touch > sinking away from the surface of the paper and into the deep blue / lone leaf's mainstream > clear current / veined eclipse > moons emerge / holy ghosts > arranged in a line > we were here in time .

Collaborative poem: Stephan Barrett. Helene Greenwood. Tania Kovats. Ben Waddington.
Cyanotype: Martin Freeman.

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Foreword

Confluence: The River Speaks was a multi-disciplinary project designed to explore life and livelihood along the River Wandle and to question how the concepts and realities of “river” and of “human” might find common ground.

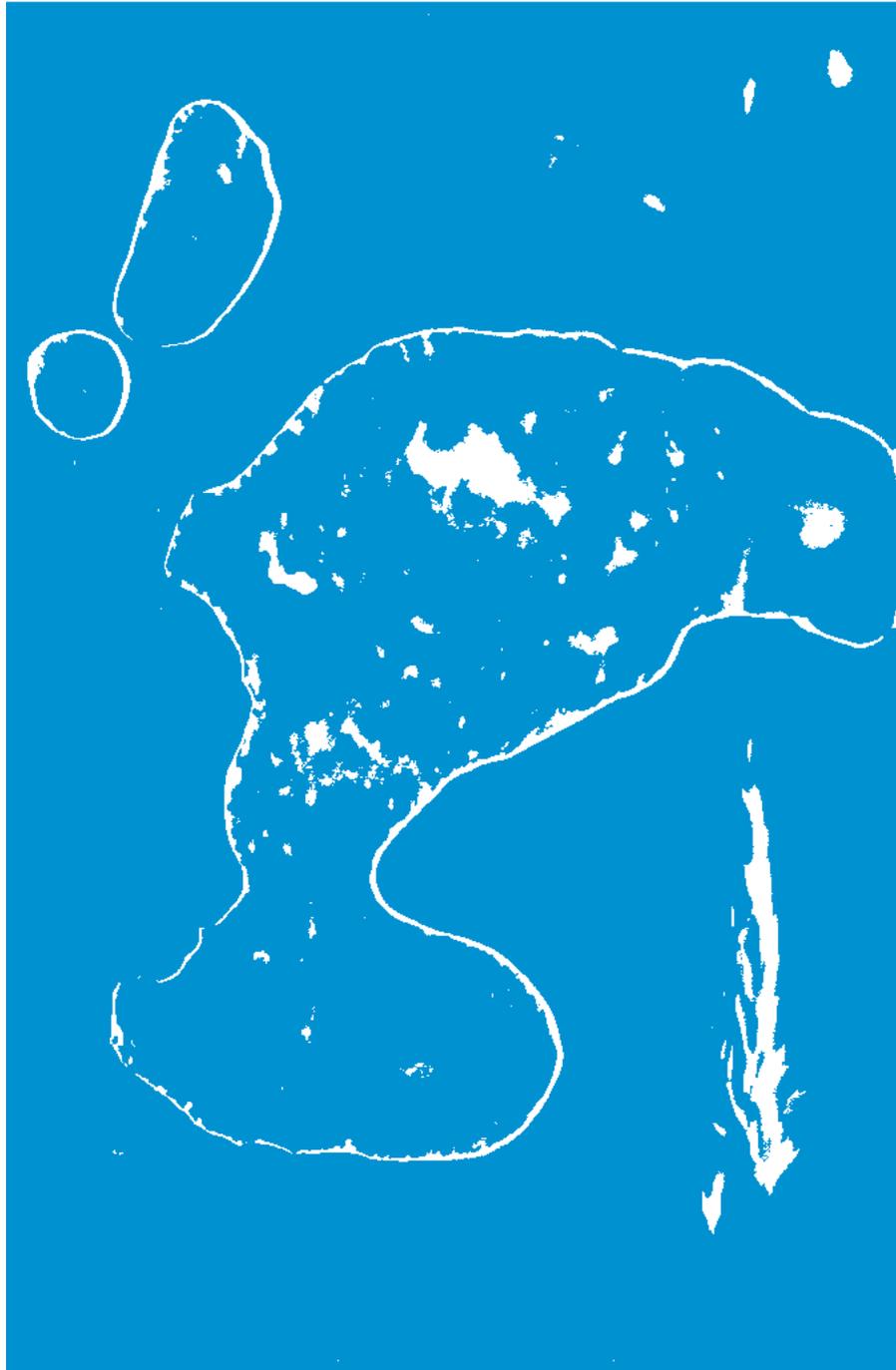
Working with groups local to the river, individuals and interested visitors, the participatory project ran from September to October 2017 and was a response to research, acknowledging the natural and physical aspects of the River Wandle and the historical and cultural resonance it has for those that live, work and play by it.

Coinciding with Tania Kovats’ installation at the Ram Quarter Heritage Centre, the project reflected the action of collecting elements of and from the river, and the creative translation of water to represent not just the river, but also the history and landscape of the Wandle Valley.

This complementary booklet offers a short history of the river and gives an overview of each of the workshops that took place along with photographs and examples of the artworks created by the participants. Studded throughout the booklet are poems and exploratory texts that have been written by participants. You will also find observations offered by participants with regard to their experiences during the workshops woven through the related pages.

Finally, I have written an insight into the permanent audio-visual installation that has been created for the Ram Quarter Heritage Centre. The piece features many of the sound recordings made during the workshops and was inspired by the visual artworks created and the conversations had with participants. The installation is both the culmination and celebration of the River Wandle project. Do immerse yourself and enjoy!

HELEN FROSI, LEAD ARTIST
FEBRUARY 2018



A Liquid History

*I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god – sullen, untamed and intractable,*

T.S. ELIOT, 'FOUR QUARTETS'

The River Wandle is a chalk stream running through southwest London, named, it is thought, after the settlement by its mouth, “Wendle’s enclosure”. Its sources are located at Wandle Park (Croydon) and Carshalton Ponds (Sutton), and its course runs for 14 miles through the Greater London boroughs of Croydon, Sutton, Merton and Wandsworth. The River Graveney (Norbury Brook) feeds into the Wandle from the East, at the border of Merton and Wandsworth.

The river’s noted human history dates back to Roman times, with its rapid flow utilised for agricultural enrichment and latterly industrial gain, especially so during the Industrial Revolution of the 18TH and 19TH Centuries when numerous water wheels were installed to power local paper, and textile mills (producing dyes, calico and silk) such as William Morris’ print house, the Liberty Print Works and Merton Board Mills. Other industry including the manufacture of tobacco (snuff), gunpowder, iron, copper and herbal oils such as peppermint and lavender, took advantage of the Wandle, then known as “the hardest working river for its size in the world.”*

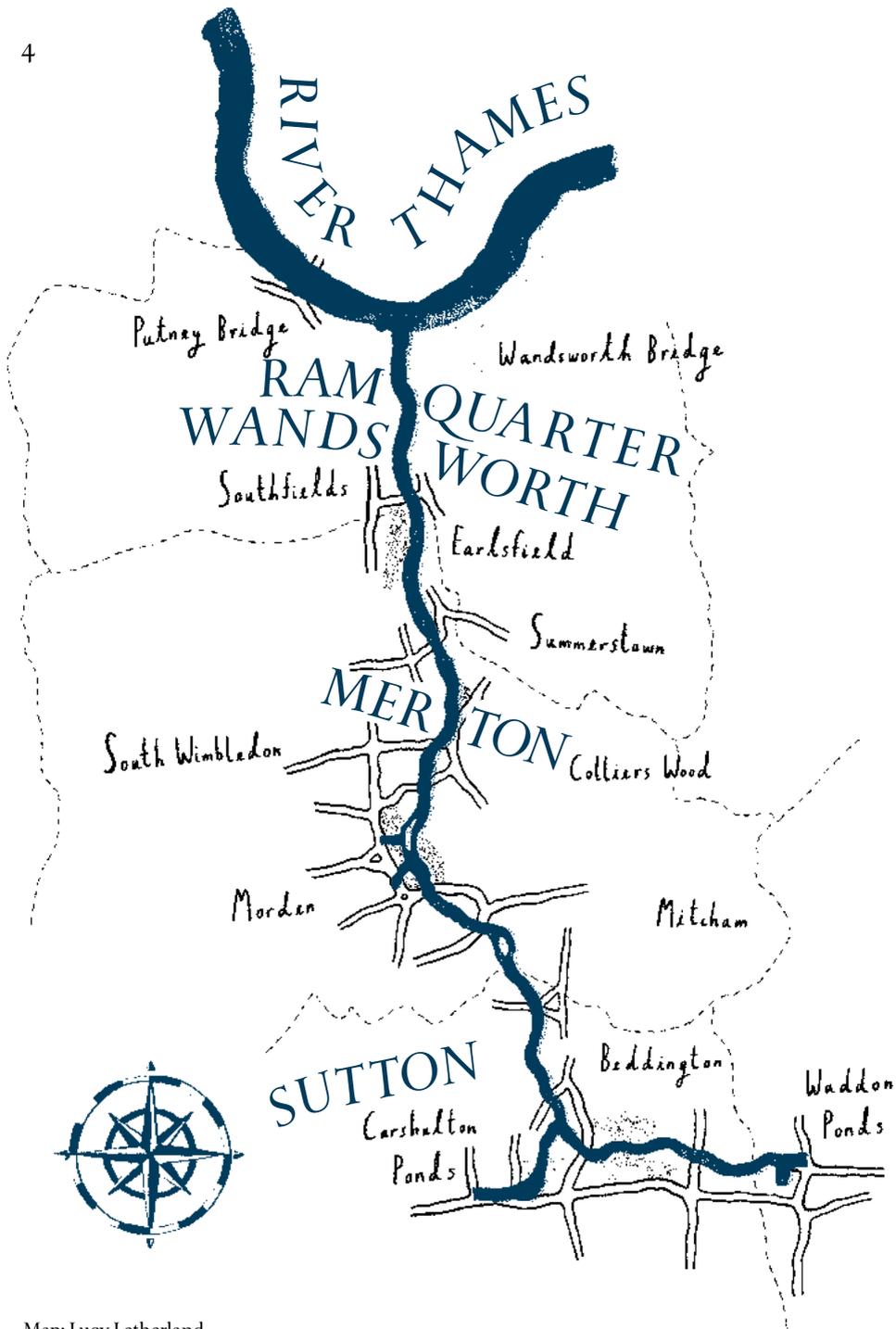
The Wandle, first forming its own course, has moreover, been defined physically and metaphorically by its industrial usage. Over time, the river’s course has been canalised, cut to form leats (channels that power mills), and finally culverted in sections to discourage the diseases and noisome odours that would have arisen due to the river’s various misuses. From the 1700s until the late 20TH Century the Wandle’s flora and fauna

*Anonymous, 1905. Wandle Industrial Museum, ‘The River Wandle’, Educational Information Leaflet’

dwindled (especially its fish stock) and by the 1960s it was declared a running sewer, infamous for running all manner of colours, care of the tanneries that discharged waste into it.

In more recent times, a concerted effort to clean up the river and improve its associated green spaces has been implemented by a variety of organisations, community groups and individuals, leading to the area being established as London’s newest Regional Park: the Wandle Valley Regional Park. By working together through initiatives such as the Living Wandle Landscape Partnership, native habitats have been restored for wildlife, invasive plant species removed, and the river is now used as an educational and creative resource to inspire local people, schoolchildren and volunteers.

*gathering moss among
fluxus, interrupted on occasion by
the fast flowing current
landscape
time foraging
current*



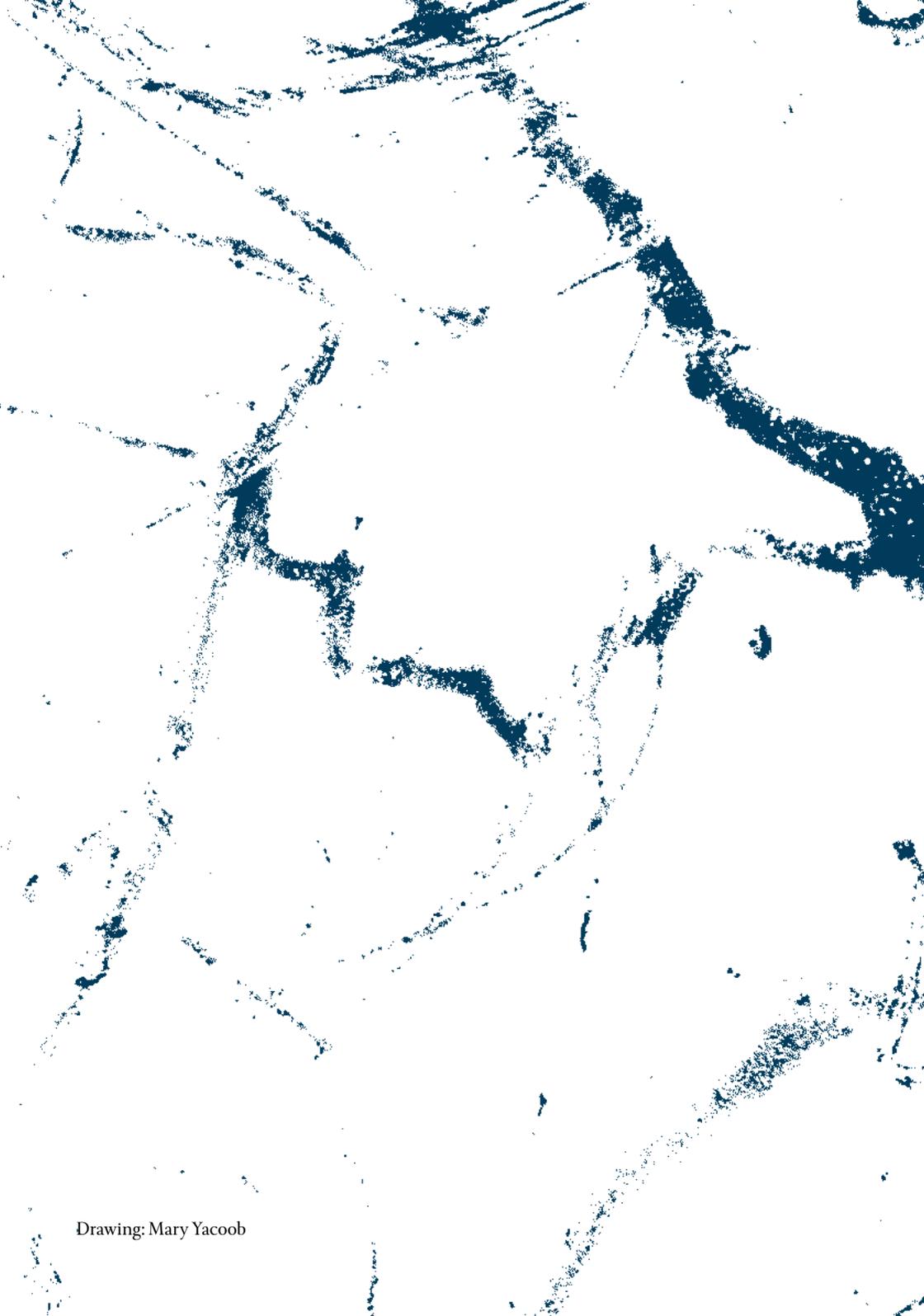
Map: Lucy Letherland

river begin begin, river begin begin

cool dank
 chaotic noise
 willow flies
 deep shadow
 find fluidity
 touch energy
 rippling thoughts

begin river begin
 breath beneath leaves
 covered over changes
 quick hidden sounds

opportunity through leaves
 beneath another willow



Drawing: Mary Yacoob

Workshops

Alongside workshops led by Helen Frosi, four sound specialists and artists were invited to lead sound recording sessions. These included listening to the hidden sounds of the river with hydrophones and contact microphones with Lee Patterson; learning about the social and industrial history of the Wandle with Ian Rawes during his river walk and listening session; interacting with the river physically and emotionally during Sharon Gal's experimental vocal session; and being playful with the river's bird population through mimicking and translation with Jane Pitt. Stephan Barrett joined the project to support each of the sound recording sessions.

Through the design of a variety of hands-on activities, philosophical and creative endeavours, each workshop explored a single aspect of the river's many facets. Through walking, drawing (en plein air), collecting found objects, and activities such as lino printing, photography and poetry writing, participants questioned how a river such as the Wandle might be seen, heard and understood.

As a whole, the workshops brought together the many aspects of the river as perceived by the various groups and individuals that spend time in, on and around its meander. The artworks created during the workshops became a creative springboard—a physical material and aesthetic resource—for the design of a permanent audio-visual installation by Helen Frosi, which is installed at the Ram Quarter Heritage Centre.

Inhabitants that stay leap over the pure, ever shifting journey

The World Is A Camera

Saturday 16 September, 11AM – 4PM

Venue: Vesty Hall (Mitcam)

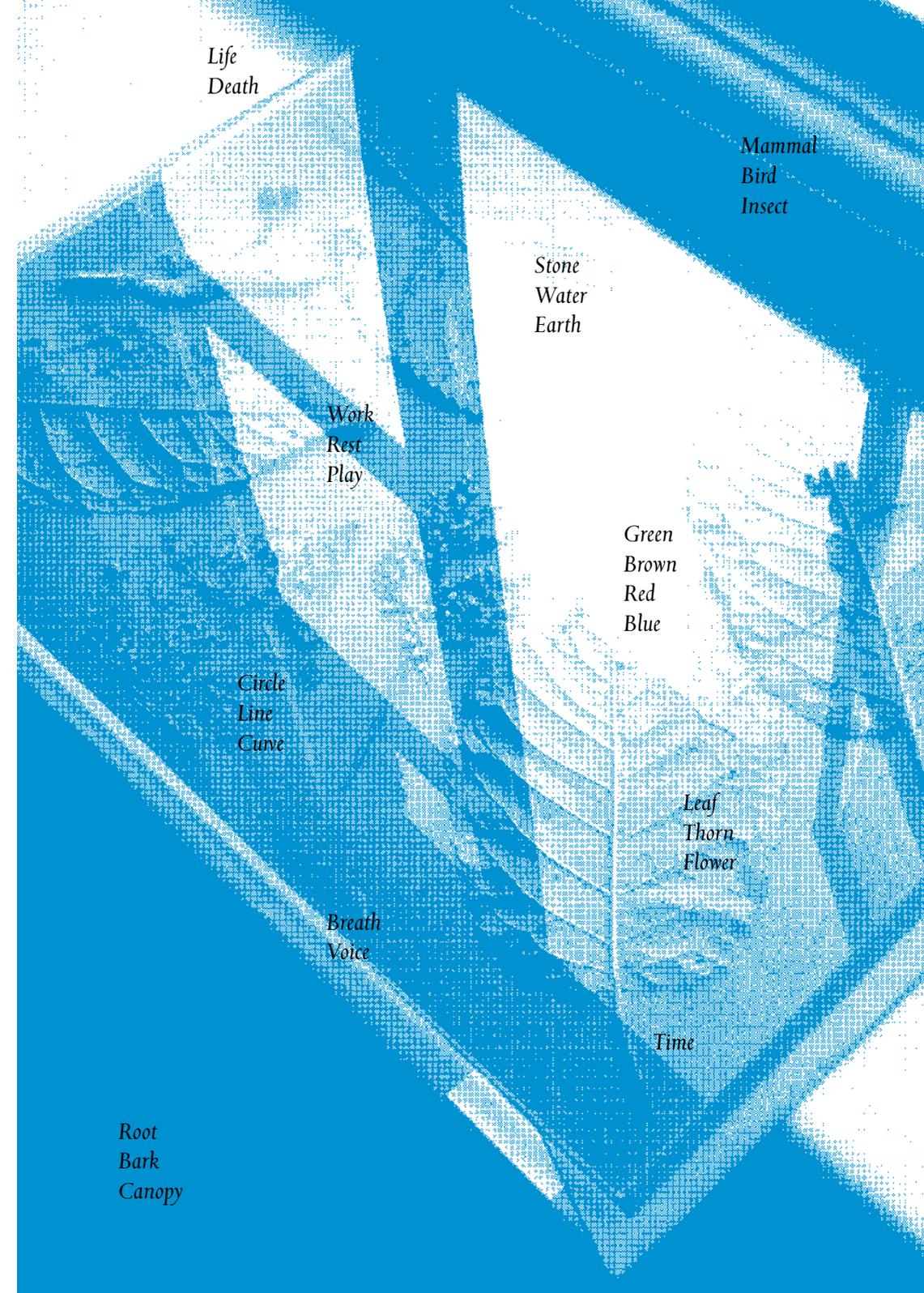
A playful, inquisitive walk and collection session that investigated the River Wandle and environs through digital and camera-less photography. The session followed the riverbank at Ravensbury Park (Morden) to the grounds of Morden Hall Park (Morden).

This session, led by artist-curator Helen Frosi, focused on the natural, cultural and social history of the river. Activities included a photographic scavenger hunt that encouraged participants to look through their lens via a number of word “provocations” and a photographic activity that explored specific elements of the river. Here, participants were encouraged to locate shapes and textures by the river, experiment with waves and light on the water’s surface, document riverbank flora and fauna, and collect photographic evidence of human activity and industry.

Participants collected objects of interest in the environment as they explored the river and nearby green spaces. These objects – leaf skeletons, pond weed, lichen encrusted sticks, gastropod-nibbled leaves and so forth – were looked at collectively, discussed, and later used to make cyanotypes. This form of camera-less photography was created by placing the found objects onto photo-sensitive paper and exposing to sunlight before a final rinse in water to set the image. The final images echo inspiration taken from botanist and photographer Anna Atkins, and in particular her publication *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impression*.

“Participating in the workshop helped deepen and enhance my perception of, and engagement with, my immediate surroundings, as well as introducing me to the many fascinating aspects of the River Wandle, places which I very much intend to revisit.”

–STEPHAN, WORKSHOP ASSISTANT, THE WORLD IS A CAMERA



Life
Death

Mammal
Bird
Insect

Stone
Water
Earth

Work
Rest
Play

Green
Brown
Red
Blue

Circle
Line
Curve

Leaf
Thorn
Flower

Breath
Voice

Time

Root
Bark
Canopy

Open Ears!

Tuesday 19 September, 10AM – 4PM,
Venue: Vestry Hall (Mitcham)

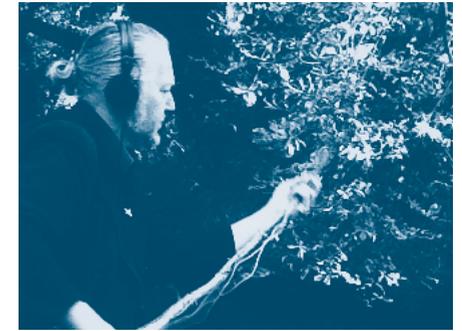
An afternoon recording session on location at Ravensbury Park (Morden) and Morden Hall Park (Morden), focusing upon acts of listening, interrogating materials and recording the sounds of local objects and features.

To initiate this recording session, sound artist Lee Patterson gave a talk about the dual yet interrelated elements of his practice, exploring how his field recording work with hydrophones and contact microphones co-exists and has co-evolved with his live work. With recorded examples (underwater sounds and vibrations within solids) alongside demonstrations of his unique, self-built instruments, he demonstrated how, given current technological possibilities, notions of studio and landscape are interchangeable, and how open ears, play and curiosity can deliver new perspectives on work and environment.

The day culminated in a walk and recording session utilising hand-made hydrophones and contact microphones to seek out the hidden sounds of, and in, the river. Listening collectively, and on their own, participants captured a variety of sounds that hint at how river stones, animals, industrial engineering, plant life and industry have affected the sounds of the river; its voice.

“I live locally in the Merton area, so was very interested in attending an art workshop held at Morden Hall Park. The introduction to contact and hydrophone microphones was extremely helpful and answered many questions I have been wondering about.”

– JACQUELINE, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, OPEN EARS!



The Sound Along The Stream

Sunday 24 September, 1 – 4PM

Venue: All Saints Church (Hackbridge)

An extended vocalisation workshop and sound walk with exploratory vocal interventions that took place along the banks of the River Wandle from Watercress Park (Hackbridge) to Watermeads Nature Reserve (Morden).

The workshop, led by experimental vocalist, performer and musician Sharon Gal, took inspiration from the varied sonic expressions found along the River Wandle and explored participants' relationships with the river as well as ideas relating to the presence, flow and the dynamics of water.

Participants were encouraged to explore their vocal range, to mimic sound around them, to listen to and become inspired by sounds within the landscape and in, on and by the water. Listening, and physical and vocal exercises developed their awareness of the space they inhabited as well as the sounds around them.

Through a walk along the River Wandle where the journey evolved organically, participants engaged and interacted with each other and the environment and made time for observation, stillness, sound production and recording. Participants sang to the water, listened to its voice and responded with glissandos, whispers, watery words, bubbles and such. Birds sang, plants swayed in the brisk autumn breeze, dogs barked at their owners and cyclists overtook the singing group whilst on their weekend bike ride. All sounds mingled to create a very particular soundscape.

“I felt engaged and focused and connected with the environment, whilst in motion as a journey, in a selected place, by the river. I became aware of vibrations, energies of the space and the other participants taking part.”

– JACKIE, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, THE SOUND ALONG THE STREAM



Drawing With Nature

Friday 29 September, 12–5PM

Venue: All Saints Church (Hackbridge)

During this session, led by Helen Frosi, the group considered the River Wandle through the perspective of geological and botanical tapestries by way of a purposefully slow walk along its banks from Watercress Park (Hackbridge) to Wilderness Island (Carshalton). Sauntering along, participants took photographs, made sketches and collected artefacts that caught their attention.

After the walk and back at the studio, participants looked through their photographs, inspected their finds and delved into both the scientific and art worlds for inspiration, browsing old copies of herbals (tomes on flora's medicinal, culinary and magical properties) and modern identification guide alongside images from the *Ha Bun Shu* by Mori Yuzan (1919), an extraordinary collection of wave and ripple designs.

Participants were introduced to experimental ways in which to document plant life, by: capturing their morphology; focusing on colours, shapes and textures by way of leaf and bark rubbings; drawing with mud and other natural materials found in situ; as well as using aluminium foil and pencils to make instant intaglio works and carbon paper to create traces/tracings and spectral copies of plant life and found artefacts. Experimenting with a variety of media, the group also used juices from leaves, berries, barks and seeds found by the river to ink paper and explore the idea of natural dye creation from wild plants and minerals.

“The workshop was a pleasure to do and inspiring. It’s refreshing to do experimental drawing, learning new processes, like making inks with berries and mud, and drawing with materials found in nature. I hope to carry through elements of this way of working into my practice as an artist.”

– MARY, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, DRAWING WITH NATURE



Lino And Light

Friday 06 October, 1 – 4PM

Venue: All Saints Church (Hackbridge)

A walk and printing workshop designed to acquaint participants with the art of lino-cutting and printing. Inspiration for imagery was taken from the natural surroundings along the River Wandle.

Exploring the fork of the River Wandle by Watercress Park (Hackbridge) this workshop, led by Helen Frosi, gave opportunity for the participants to explore the river's naturalised flora, fauna and the nature of the river itself, focusing on the play of light on the course and flow of the water, as well as the highlights and shadows on a variety of materials such as bark, foliage, feathers and discarded items (bags, cans, newspapers, balls, etc.).

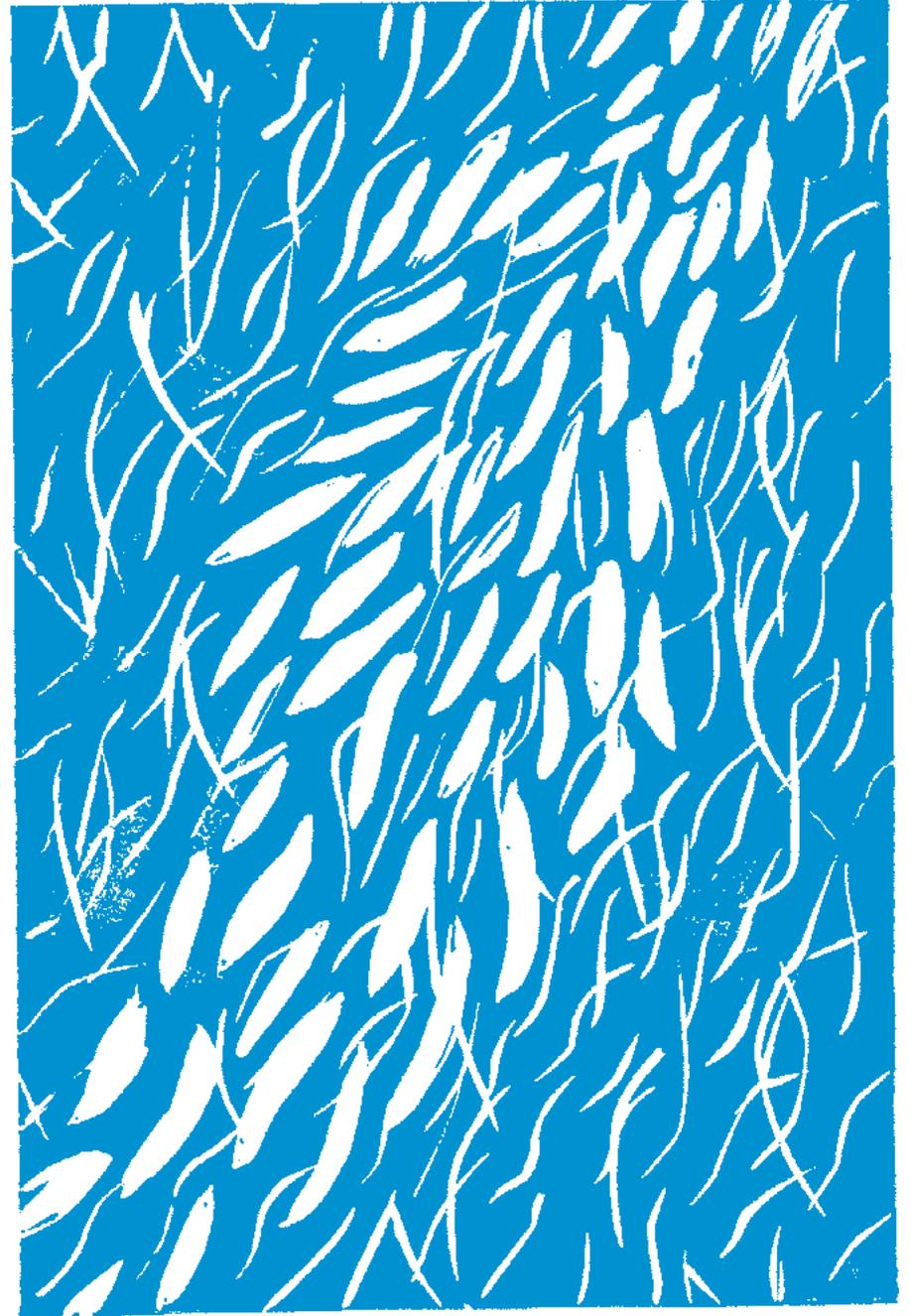
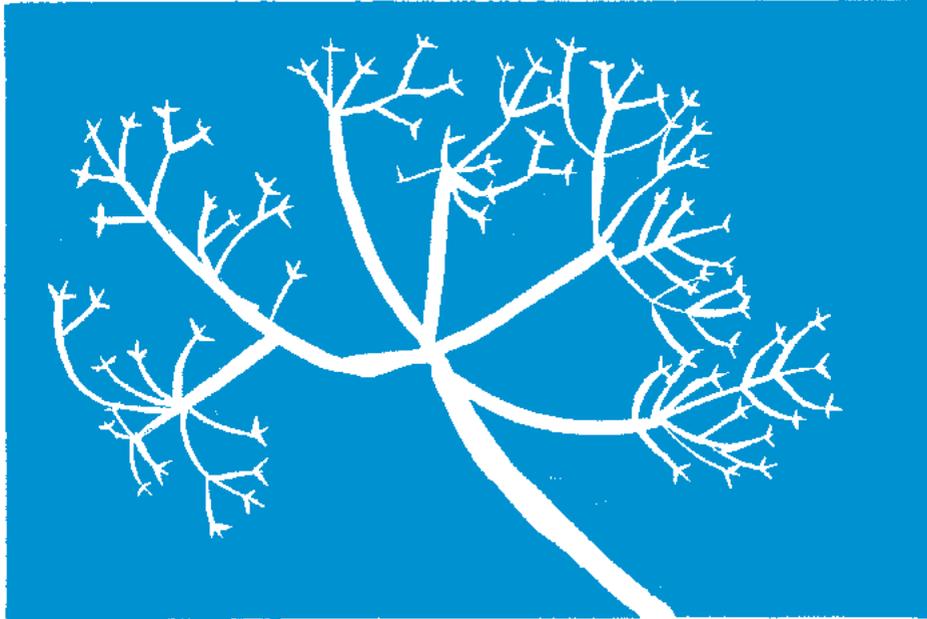
Using objects collected, photographs and notes taken during the morning walk, back at the studio participants translated their ideas first into line drawings and later, after exploring a variety of cutting techniques, into beautiful monochrome linoprints, examples of which are to be found in, and on the cover of, this booklet.

“Great to visit the Wandle and get inspiration for the lino cutting and to acquire some new techniques and workshop leader made the session enjoyable, peaceful and the results were super!”

– ADRIENNE, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, LINO AND LIGHT



Print: Stephan Barrett



The River Speaks

Sunday 15 October, 10AM – 5PM

Route: Earlsfield Rail Station (Earlsfield) to Morden Hall Park (Morden)

A river-long walk and recording session, in sound and photography, where participants were encouraged to look and listen out for hidden histories whilst also considering the links between sound and image. The walk began at Earlsfield railway station, walking south through Garrett Park, Wandle Meadow Nature Reserve, Wandle Park, by Merton Abbey Mills, and concluded after an exploration of Morden Hall Park.

Field recordist Ian Rawes, respected for his long-term project The London Sound Survey, led this field-recording session along the River Wandle. Ian brought his experience and historical knowledge (industrial and cultural) to the session to inspire and provoke questions. Equally, participants were encouraged to share their own experiences of the River Wandle with the group.

During the walk, participants discussed the industrial heritage of the river; spotted the remains of flues, boats, culverts and mills; listened to the crackle of a nearby electricity substation; tracked human-made channels; sniffed out hidden autumn fungi and a city farm; identified a grey heron, long-tailed tits, pigeons, mallards and an unidentified bird's nest (whilst hearing robins, blackbirds and a variety of corvidae); and listened to the frothy flow of the river through a fallen willow and a similar sounding sluice.

Visiting Merton Abbey Mills – the once site of Morris & Co.'s workshops and Liberty & Co.'s silk printworks – the group experienced a working water mill at The Wheelhouse (one of only four extant across the river), which was once used to rinse gum from printed silks and now turns a potter's wheel.

In addition to collective listening activities and sound recording in situ, there was ample time simply to close one's eyes and listen to the riverscape in quiet reflection.



"I found the workshop fun and educational. I learnt about different kinds of recording equipment that can be used outdoors. There was advice about how to use equipment under different conditions. We got to practice making sound recordings and we talked about immersing ourselves in the environment, taking time to observe, listen and notate it."

– MARY, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, THE RIVER SPEAKS

Materials And Memory

Saturday 21 October, 11AM – 4PM

Venue: Vestry Hall (Mitcham)

A session that focused on the material and psychological properties of objects and experiences gleaned on walks taken along the River Wandle at Morden Hall Park (Morden).

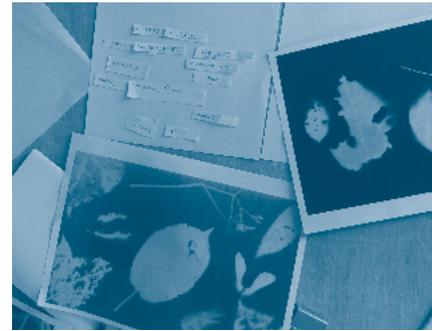
This session, led by Helen Frosi, engaged participants with the pleasures of the natural world by way of various sensory activities, the collection of natural materials, and through drawing and writing exercises.

Whilst on the river walk participants explored the rich sensory landscape of the waters, scrub and parkland by creating directional sound maps in pen and ink. They had the opportunity to listen to their environment amplified through a directional recording device and were encouraged to take in their environment through their eyes, hands and noses as they made drawings in situ and collected colours and textures from the vicinity by way of rubbings and descriptive notes.

Taking inspiration from the first nations of America's and Australia's practices of collecting objects and creating tangible artefacts that tell stories of events or travels, participants created their own aide memoires in the form of a "journey stick" from items such as leaves, stones, seeds, feathers and other found items that had been collected during their walk. Each item represented a specific moment or memory from the walk and was twined onto a stick using a variety of coloured wools to represent the binding together of ideas and lives.

"The workshop was insightful, I learned to appreciate my other senses and enjoy the view of the park through practical and creative, engaging tasks."

– SABRINA, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, MATERIALS AND MEMORY



Fl-utter-ances

Friday 27 October, 12 – 3PM

Venue: All Saints Centre (Hackbridge)

A circular walk through Watercress Park (Hackbridge) to Wilderness Island (Carshalton) and a field-recording session that brought participants into contact with birds and other creatures that live and breed along the River Wandle via listening and vocalisation exercises.

Along The Wandle Trail are lush sites of flora and fauna. Focusing on the variety of bird life in the area, artist Jane Pitt brought attention to the diversity of calls that could be heard through a simple listening exercise that focused on sound – directionally, and both near and far away.

Participants documented what was seen and heard in the undergrowth and along the river banks through text and sound recordings. With time, they constructed onomatopoeia and phonetic descriptions of the birdcalls they heard, making occasional stops to create personal vocal versions of these bird sounds (consulting the sound maps they had made as a guide or score). The sonic stroll ended with a collective recording session to capture the group's attempts at mimicking birdsong.

As the group walked home, a kingfisher flashed its teal jacket from under a low bridge, its fiery tail fanned in the evening light.

An unexpected chance to stop and tap into senses that are overlooked. Stepping out of the city and into a beautiful unknown spot to explore and contemplate sounds and how sounds are made.”

ANNEKE, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, FL-UTTER-ANCES



kick kick

peeu peeu

piii piii

kick

croaking / quacking / loud trilling or whinny

FRANK

KAARK

kuu-ruk

ke-ke-ke-ke

ke-wick

hooo-hoo-hoo

tswick

chreee

chee-kee

hard tack and grating churr

rrrs and zzzzzs repetitive chatter and churrr

with frequent changes in pitch

zit

zit

zit zit

zit zit zit

zit zit zit zit

succession of zit notes getting

louder and faster

huit

orrr-ooo-coo

coo-oo-cuk, coo-oo-cuk

KRAAAH

tchjak'tchjak-ak

pink

pink-pink

tic

tseeee

chak-chak-ak

pruk

Poetics Of The River

Sunday 29 October, 12–3PM

Venue: Sutton Ecology Centre (Carshalton)

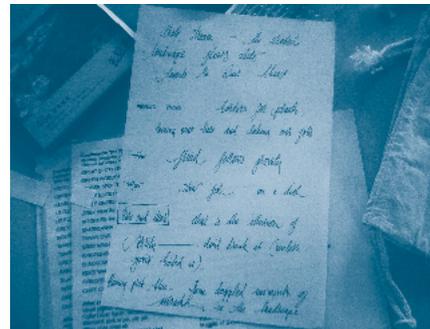
An experimental poetry workshop that explored the physical, sensory and spectral presence of the River Wandle and its environs, taking place at the Sutton Ecology Centre (Carshalton) with explorations around the Grove and Carshalton Ponds.

Using in situ listening exercises and a collection of photographs and objects from along the river as inspiration, participants created a collection of text works. During the session, participants learned about and explored a variety of experimental writing techniques, from automatic- and guided writing exercises (splicing historical and creative texts together) through to folding pieces, collaborative writings and cut-up and erasure/redactions of poems written by other participants.

Participants worked together and independently to create sonic and concrete (visual) poems, incorporating images, onomatopoeic words and invented languages within their works to trace, invoke and transform the sounds, shapes and textures of the Wandle's waters. A selection of the poems written during this session are published throughout this booklet.

“A really inspiring session. The timed writing sessions were very useful in helping to discover new poetic approaches and I enjoyed collaborating with the other workshop participants and the workshop leader to create new work. It was also great to explore the Wandle and Carshalton Ponds on such a beautiful day.”

– STEPHAN, WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, POETICS OF THE RIVER



Acknowledgements

Confluence: The River Speaks has been commissioned on behalf of Greenland Group, developer of Ram Quarter, as part of an exciting arts programme curated by cultural placemaking agency Futurecity in partnership with Pump House Gallery. The project engages with the local community to explore the fascinating history of the River Wandle and the surrounding area.

The project is supported by Wandsworth Council and Enable Leisure & Culture and Living Wandle Landscape Partnership. LWLP is an ambitious £2.4m programme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund celebrating and promoting access to the River Wandle's natural and built heritage.

Confluence: The River Speaks is part of the Pump House Gallery OutHouse programme. This programme aims to work with artists and local communities to find ways to explore, capture and animate the local environment.

FUTURECITY.CO.UK
PUMPHOUSEGALLERY.ORG.UK
WANDLEVALLEYPARK.CO.UK

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Phil Copestake for the use of his art studio. June Mountsteven at the All Saints Centre. Staff at Sutton Ecology Centre. Staff at Vestry Hall.

All artworks and poems in this publication were created by workshop participants, often collaboratively. Additional field recordings by Lee Patterson and Stephan Barrett are included in the AV installation at the Ram Quarter Heritage Centre. All are used with kind permission. Copyright for individual artworks remains with the individual creator(s).

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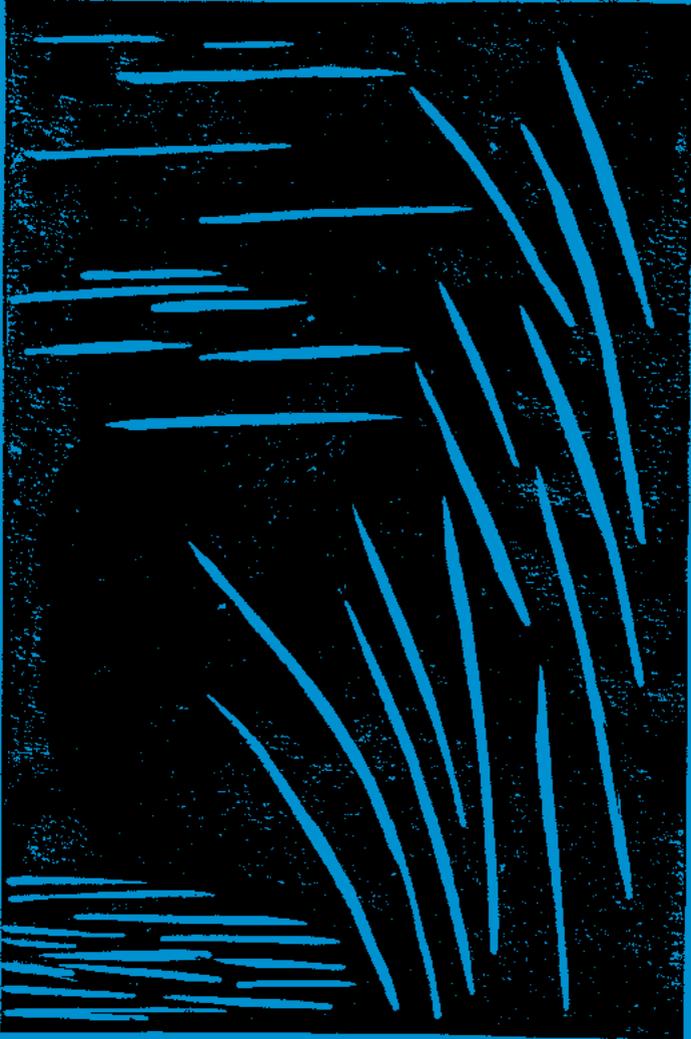


flicks of curled light
deep green
on red
blurring the edges
bark cracks
fronds
smear
hidden earth
dappled
decay
forbidden
fruit
ice blue ghosts

river channelling – rippling ever outward a fluid spiderweb of thought . light sparkling in my mind, a nemesis where does the river begin . can you find where I begin, this fluid fluidity inside – trying to channel, then release in ever widening streams . rivers of consciousness . what happens when the spirals and parabola touch – to set off new wavelets of energy . cannot be contained, controlled or concretised, covered over . It streams underneath our feet in charged frequencies a chaos of high, low and then pure white noise.

Poem: Helene Greenwood

Cyanotype: Rebecca Denholm



Confluence: The River Speaks

Helen Frosi