

River Wandle: Flowing through Time



River Wandle: Flowing through Time

A Living Wandle Publication

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Woodcut and Collage by Jane Porter

Wandle: Flowing through time

Groundwork London has embarked on a fascinating journey through time following the River Wandle as it meanders through the lives of the many people living and working on its banks. Over the past year we have collected an abundance of stories, past and present, relating to the River Wandle. These stories have been shared by different people across the community- from school children who are newly discovering its secrets to elderly people who know them all too well. Throughout time the Wandle has inspired people from all walks of life, from artists to writers, to wanderers and the curious. This book is a collection of some of the most interesting stories we came by.

Introduction

Stretching 9 miles across four boroughs in the South of London the River Wandle passes through Croydon, Sutton, Merton finally joining the River Thames at Wandsworth. Steeped in history and a major player during England's industrial revolution the River Wandle has become one of London's lesser known waterways.

In its heyday it accommodated over 40 mills and was one of the busiest rivers in the world during Victorian times. The main industries were tobacco and textile and with water so pure and clear it attracted prestigious printers like William Morris and Arthur Liberty. Sadly, the Wandle became a victim of its own success and by the 1960's the Wandle was officially declared a sewer, running pink, blue and all the other colours the tanneries were using. In recent years there's been a drive by volunteers and local groups to restore the River Wandle and the effort received a massive boost in June 2013 when The Living Wandle Landscape Partnership scheme was successful in its bid to the tune of almost £2million of Heritage Lottery funding.

The Partnership scheme aims to deliver a series of improvement projects along the whole length of the River Wandle. The over-arching aim is to revitalise the Wandle, creating opportunities to involve local people in a range of projects and activities which celebrate the heritage, culture, landscape and biodiversity of the river.

Delivered by Groundwork London; River Wandle: Flowing through Time is one of sixteen projects running over the next 4 years. Projects range from discovering the source of the Wandle to encouraging residents living in social housing along the river to get involved in shaping future developments to teaching young people to fish in the river to climate change awareness.

"Flowing through Time" is an oral history project through which we recorded people's memories and experiences of the River Wandle. These recordings informed and shaped our sister project Reflecting the Wandle (Vandalis); a community film based on people's memories. This book chronicles some of the most interesting memories and experiences we discovered through the project.

Inspired by the Wandle



Throughout the ages the River Wandle has inspired an array of beautiful art works and fascinating creative projects, from hand-crafted canoes and iron-age coracles to colourful illustrations and intricate prints. In this section of the book we share some of the most imaginative and interesting art works and the stories behind them.

Jane's Wandle Alphabet

Local artist and illustrator Jane Porter shares with us some of the fascinating Wandle projects she's been involved in.

I have done a lot of different art projects with the Wandle in fact, but the one I will share first is my Wandle alphabet, because that is the one I am most proud of.

I have been a volunteer with the Wandle trust for probably about 10 years, so every month we have a clean-up in the river getting in waders, and one time I found an L plate from a car, a learner plate, and I thought Oh maybe I could get a whole alphabet out of this. So I set myself the challenge.

All the other clean-up volunteers were helping and they would come up and say "How about this for an R" and that sort of thing, and five years later I managed to get a full set and through photographing them and digitally putting them together I have made a poster of the Wandle alphabet.

"I would go to every clean up thinking, "I wonder which letter I am going to find today?'. "

Well it was a real challenge and I would go to every clean up thinking, "I wonder which letter I am going to find today?" and sometimes I would find three and sometimes I wouldn't find any. And when I found the last letter I was a little bit disappointed because then I wouldn't have anything to look for anymore, but I am, even though it is now finished I am still going to the clean-ups just to do the clean-up because I love being in the water.

Oh, I found all sorts really, some are bits of car number plates, so the F is from a Fish and Chip sign and the J is a D lock from a bicycle with a bit broken off it so it is a J shape. The S is a necklace that I just sort of put into that shape, all sorts of things really. I have got a typewriter key for the Z, and a Mercedes logo thing off a car for the Y, so yeah all sorts of different things.



Wandle Alphabet
 All the letters were found in the river wandle by
 illustrator Jane Porter and fellow Wandle volunteers.
www.wandletrust.org



Wandle Screen Prints

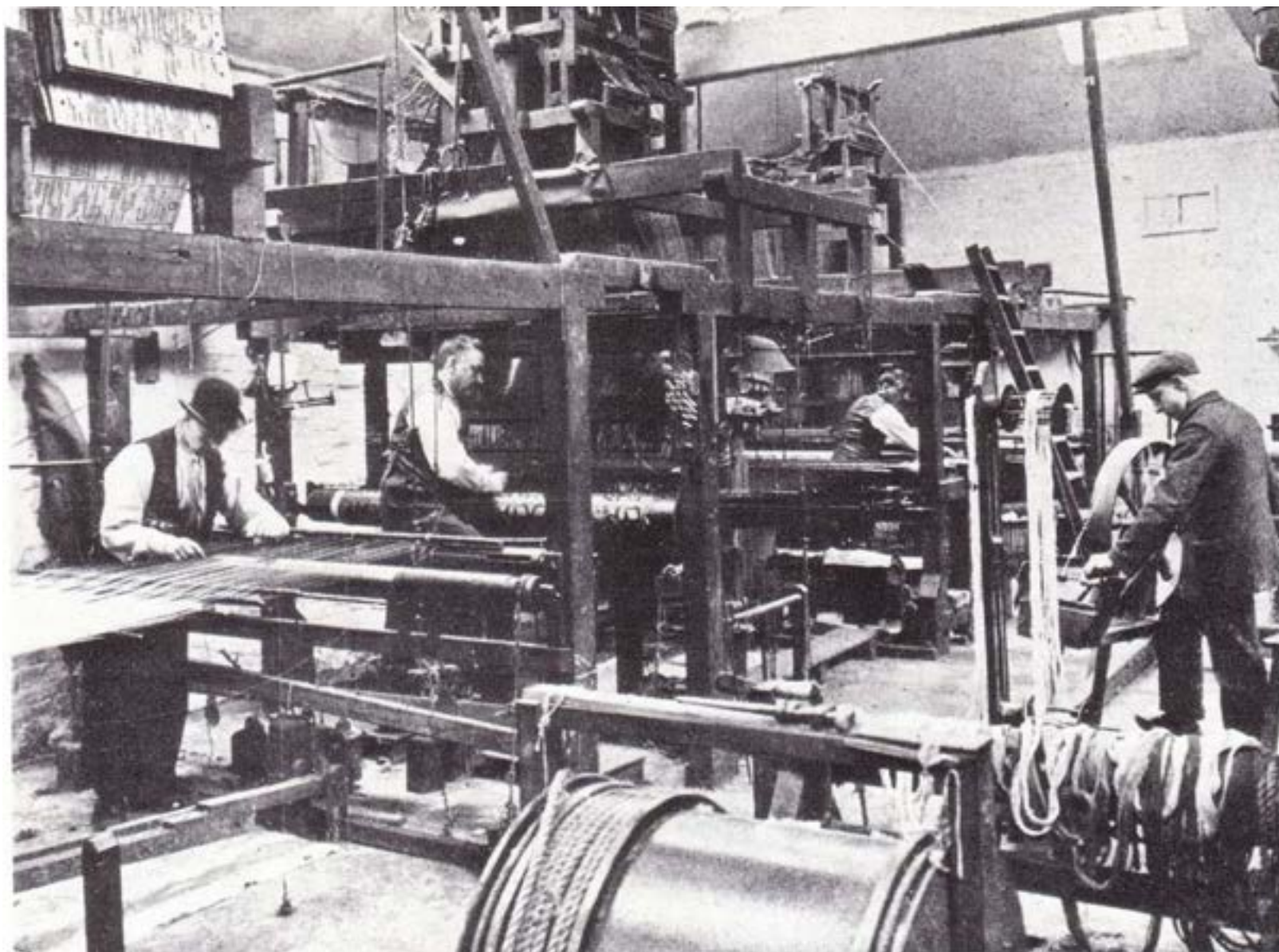
Students from Harris Academy in Morden took inspiration from Jane Porter's Wandle alphabet and created their very own colourful and imaginative river inspired prints.

The prints included letters of the alphabet and Wandle themed images to go with them from butterflies and fish, to wheels and cogs.

Before they got to work on the prints the students were introduced to the project and taken up to Morden Hall Park to experience the sights and smells of the river for themselves.

Screen prints produced by the young people from Harris Academy school





"Morris and Company Weaving at Merton Abbey" by Anonymous for Morris & Co. - Scanned from Fairclough, Oliver and Emmeline Leary, Textiles by William Morris and Morris & Co.



"Morris and Company Textile Printing Merton Abbey" by Anonymous for Morris & Co. - Scanned from Fairclough, Oliver and Emmeline Leary, Textiles by William Morris and Morris & Co. 1861-1940, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1981

William Morris and his Prints

In 1881 William Morris, the well-renowned English textile designer, novelist and social campaigner moved his workshop out of London to Merton Abbey in Surrey. This rural location provided the space he needed to expand the range of products manufactured in house. The River Wandle ran through the site providing a supply of fresh running water for dyeing and printing textiles.

By Jacqueline, Wandsworth Mind

The building that is there used to print the very famous artist William Morris' prints, and the river was used to work the water mill, which in turn used the printing presses to print the wallpaper

and textiles, which were then delivered to the fashionable Liberty's in central London.

The store still survives today, and if you go to Merton Abbey Mills, it's still a very bright and colourful place. His prints were so beautiful. You see them today because there are still examples of his material that would be used.

I was interested in art so I was very interested in some of the prints at the printing press. And that building is not used now as a printing press it's only used for pottery but the history's there and his memory lives on.

The Wandle Industrial Museum in Mitcham stores and produces a number of William Morris prints in their archives. The photographs on the right were purchased from the museum.

The Morris Collection



Cory, designed by William Morris in 1884
Produced by Wandle Industrial Museum, Mitcham, Surrey

The Morris Collection



Strawberry Thief, designed by William Morris in 1883
Produced by Wandle Industrial Museum, Mitcham, Surrey

The Morris Collection



Rose and Lily, designed by Henry Doulton in 1893
Produced by Wandle Industrial Museum, Mitcham, Surrey

The Morris Collection



African Marigold, designed by William Morris in 1886
Produced by Wandle Industrial Museum, Mitcham, Surrey

The Morris Collection



All of The Forest, designed by William Morris, Philip Webb and Henry Doulton in 11
Produced by Wandle Industrial Museum, Mitcham, Surrey

The Morris Collection



Hindle, designed by William Morris in 1884
Produced by Wandle Industrial Museum, Mitcham, Surrey



Jane's Coracle

By Jane Porter

I have another little Wandle story. I have built a coracle, which is a sort of iron age type of boat made of cow hide and I have paddled that on the Wandle. I went on a weekend course to a man in Shropshire and he showed me how. I went with my son and we built this coracle together, it was a nice weekend project.



Andy's Canoe

By Andy Hodge, South Mitcham Community Association

The greatest fun I had was in my last year at school. One of my main enjoyments was woodwork and I actually made a fourteen foot plywood canoe. I obviously needed a body of water to test it on and the nearest body of water of course was the Wandle. So I'm one of the few people who can say they've actually boated along the Wandle. I put it in near where Deen City Farm is now, on Phipps Bridge Road at the end of Holmesdale Gardens and paddled through, ducked under the bridges, under the railway bridge as it was then which is now the Tramline, into as we called it Hatfields Park, although it's Morden Hall Park.

"You can't do that here with the canoe!"

I remember I got shouted at by the park keeper, "You can't do that here with the canoe". So, I thought fair enough. I managed to sort of jump out of the water, turned the canoe around, and paddled back out again, great fun!



Floating Lanterns

by Jane Porter

I have another art project to do with the Wandle working at Morden Hall Park. A few years ago they wanted me to get involved with a project that linked to schools.

It was Wimbledon Chase Primary School and Cricket Green, and I had always wanted to do a floating lantern festival, I had seen pictures of them in Thailand and in places like that on the internet, and I thought this is a good chance so all the children, every child, made a little floating lantern with a foam board base, and then it had greaseproof paper around the outside, and they decorated it so they were all individual and looked really beautiful.

Then they put a little T-light in and they all came back at dusk one evening, it was in November, and we floated them down the river, and some friends from the Wandle Trust came and got in the water in their waders to make sure we didn't leave them in there and they didn't go out to sea. So we caught them all again. But it was a really magical occasion, I will never forget that.

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On Merton Abbey Mills

Jacqueline, Wandsworth Mind

It's a very bright and colourful place. It houses a craft market and there's a rock shop and all sorts of crafts there, and the building that the water mill is attached to still today is used for artistic purposes. They use it to produce pottery and so they make ceramics and ceramic tiles and they make pots so there is this lovely feeling of art generated through this small structure. The water mill still moves and it's ever turning and it's rather lovely to see. When you go to a marketplace so often with the hustle and bustle, the difference between Merton and other places is that you can get the refreshing views of the river and this offers a tranquil spot in what would otherwise be a hustling and bustling market place.

I discovered Merton, probably about twenty-five years ago, I used to go there frequently about once a fortnight. It was busier then actually. There was a lot more market stalls there and it made it very interesting, and what are now restaurants was one long building which housed an indoor market so you've got the outdoor market and also an indoor market and it was all arts and crafts and it made it much busier and much more exciting.

You still have the outside market and there's a bandstand and during the summer time you get a feeling of festival because there's lots of music running through the place as well. So you've got the lovely river rippling along, then you've got the rhythm of the music and then the hubbub of people talking and enjoying themselves and so it makes it



a lovely exciting place to go to and they have cultural things on there too. I think it's called the colour theatre and they have small theatricals there and some of them are for children and other theatre productions that are for adults but culturally it's quite an exciting place.



Screen print created by the young people from Harris Academy



Photographs courtesy of Wandsworth Heritage Services

Wandle Memories

Local residents from the Age UK walk and Age UK Memory Lane Group share fragments of their Wandle memories.

"By the little bridge when you come out of the gardens, where the teas are and everything, the garden centre, you go through the little archway, there's gravel there and that's where the river is. On the other side of the river they had beehives, where the bees make honey."

And there were beautiful chestnut trees and they come out like candle flowers and dogs swam there, huge dogs shaking their furs, soaking wet...

"It was interesting to see where the two rivers met and it created a sort of a gushing waterfall which was quite exciting and it was only a small area but again it's another area that the Wandle goes through so it made it rather interesting."

"Being near the water is always relaxing but on a very hot day it makes it very refreshing because you often get a cool breeze and the smell of the river. You know it's not just what you see; the sight of the river, but where the waterfall was: it's sight, it's sound and it's taste, because when the river's moving you also get the taste of the river or the fragrance of the river so it attacks most of your senses."

"It certainly looks like it needs a little bit of tender loving care from where the Abbey Mills is. And along in front it looks tatty at times."

"I used to go a lot more frequently than I do now, but there are some shops and a café there. Then the bandstand in the summer plays jazz or they did."

I've seen a kingfisher on that part of the river as well... I have seen a kingfisher, yes....

"They had in the summer, open air plays. My brothers and sisters in law come from Fulham. We eat then we walk around the park."

"No, it's just I felt that the Wandle to the front of Colliers Wood at the Savacentre, Marks and Spencers, always looks sad, it always looks so rubbishy with all the rubbish that people throw in it from the thing and it looks like it needs a bit of tender loving care, sort of that area."

"Before my time, according to that play we saw in the park a couple of years ago, the Wandle was the busiest river in this country for was it water mills? Along there. They had so many of them. I have never seen those except for the ones at Abbey Mills and the ones in the park. We still got two mills which occasionally run I believe."

Valerie

"I remember as a child fishing by the Wandle, there used to be the old peoples' home and it was really really lovely we used to go up the drive then come back, we used to have our fishing rods and fish there."

Kathleen



My father worked for James watercress farm, and the river was used for growing the watercress in cos it was so clean and beautiful in those days. Sadly no watercress farms now, all factories, sadly.



I don't think anybody understood where polio came from but if it came from anywhere it came from the River Wandle at that point, stay away, they would say...'

Barbara Holgate

We used to play by the Wandle river, by the bridge that goes to Deen city farm. I don't know if it is a sewage or what it was but we used to play on that. But the one thing we were always told if you are going down there to play then don't go into the water because you get polio... we were always very careful not to go into the water.



People on a bridge and by the riverside, Wandsworth c.1900



SAMBROOK'S BREWERY

BATTERSEA BAR
FOOD
LIVE MUSIC
& SPORT
POOL & DARTS

Sambrook's Brewery

Shane Whelan, an employee at Sambrook's brewery and a former employee at Young's, both located on the banks of the River Wandle shares his story.

I currently run the transport side of things here at Sambrooks. I'm involved in the logistical, trucking side. I used to work at Young's Brewery in the middle of Wandsworth.

I think it was 2004 I started working at Young's; it closed in 2006. I was there for two years. I started there, for a year I was like sort of a builder's labourer, so I basically went around the building, with the builder, around the whole of the yards, doing odd jobs here and there and then for the last year I moved into the warehouse, driving a forklift, loading and unloading the lorries that went out into trade. I've always lived just down the road from the brewery, but my uncle who I got a job for here, he originally got me the job there because he worked there and when I was about 18 or 19 a vacancy came up and because a family member was already working there, it was a shoe-in and I got the job.

It was really good working at Young's. There were a lot of people. When I started there was probably about four or five hundred people and it was kind of like a community within a workplace, because it was quite old school. It had been there for 150 odd years and the way people worked was a lot differently to a lot of companies these days and you kind of had a specific job role. So whereas here it's more diverse and you do a bit of everything, in the workplace there you kind of just done your one job role. Because there were so many people to cover every single job role, so you could concentrate on just doing one thing and that was it basically. But everyone knew each other so it was a really good place to work.

I remember fishing out footballs from the Wandle when I worked at Young's because just down the road in Wandsworth, they had like a football astroturf field and the balls would go over the fence and then come along the river to the back of the brewery, just behind the warehouse. I used to go out there and skive for 20 minutes when no one was looking and then all of a sudden I see all these footballs come racing down the river and I'd go out the front gates of the brewery, turn right and go over the bridge and come down the side with a little net and fish in all these footballs and at the end of the year I had a big black binbag full of just footballs and they were all really good new ones as well. Skiving does pay sometimes.

I used to play for the cricket team there as well; an actual cricket team and so it was like a community type thing. Young's Brewery laid on their own cricket team and we had a full fixture list throughout every summer. They would lay on beers and food and that, most games. It was really good. We played teams from all around sort of the London area basically. We used to play Fullers as well. They had a cricket team. Don't know if they still do but they did at that point and, yeah, it was good fun.

I guess I already knew that there was the possibility that Young's would close when I first started because for about five or six years it was going round that they could be closing. But as years went by, everyone figured that it wasn't going to happen because it had been spoken about for years and nothing had happened. And then I'd been there for about a year, and we all got taken into a meeting on Buckhold Road, where they used to do wines and spirits, that was part of the brewery as well. We just got told that the brewery was closing and we had people coming around for the following year, digging up parts of the ground, seeing if they could, you know, what they could get out of the ground and if they could build on it and stuff, and so... 2005, was the last brew and I stayed on for another year in the warehouse.

And they'd already started brewing up in Bedford but they was just bringing the beer back down and using Wandsworth as like a big storage unit and we were still delivering from there, but it wasn't actually being brewed on site for the last year of operation.

Well, after that, I struggled to find work a little bit. I kind of figured that I'd just fall into work and it wasn't quite as easy as everyone thought and I started working on an agency for Heineken, which is Kuhne & Nagel, based in Croydon, and I saw a little, well it was funny, actually, I was looking online months beforehand. I saw a brewery and I just sent my CV off. I never heard anything back for months; I didn't think anything of it. Then one day out of the blue my Nan saw an ad in the paper saying local brewery doing well, etc. And she said, "Get in contact!" So I left it, I left it, all of a sudden a few months later I was still in work at the agency delivering beer and I got a phone call, "Are you still interested in the job," straightaway I said "Yes," and went down there for an interview.

I mean it's the same job in a sense. You're still delivering beer. You're still out seeing customers, delivering around London. You know, it started off really small and it's still small in comparison to a lot of other companies. When I started there were about four of us and now there's about 14 or something like that. So it's slowly growing and it's slowly starting to become more of a Young's type brewery but just on a smaller scale.

Brewery Life

Former workers from Young's give us a fascinating insight into life at the brewery.

The chap who trained Young's Shire Horses, he got them down on a farm somewhere. He used to do shows with them. The horse and cart used to go all the way to Parson's Green.

At Young's brewery there was a Cartesian screw to pull the water up from the Wandle.

"When anyone died who worked at Young's, the Young's horses would draw a glass carriage and we'd all come out and salute and have a minute's silence."

"...he works at Young's in Wandsworth. He's the custodian."

We have a shop and a bar here at Sambrook's and hold open evenings on the 3rd Wednesday of each month.

"A local farmer collects the spent grains to use for cattle feed. He used to collect from Young's too, he started in 1966"

"Duncan Sambrook is young at heart and he has Young's at heart, too. When Young's Brewery in Wandsworth, south London, closed in 2006, it was a hammer blow to Sambrook. He felt south London had lost an iconic brewery and he was determined to restore the fortunes of the area..."

Young's Shire Horses

Jacqueline, Wandsworth Mind

The lovely thing about Young's brewery is up until 2000 they used to have their beer kegs on drays with horses and they were horse-drawn by shire horses and these magnificent big beasts used to pull the drays all through parts of south west London to service the pubs and they'd be offloaded into the cellars where they'd stock up with their beer, and they'd hold up the traffic.

They were often felt as a mixed blessing: people loved to see the horses but if they were in cars they got very frustrated. For me, it was always a great pleasure, I didn't mind being delayed. The pleasure of seeing these lovely beasts still dragging these drays through the streets were very nice. And you know in this day and age with so many speeding cars to think that this carried on up until 2006, which was the last time they used the horse and dray, which you know is really not that long ago. There is now only a micro-brewery, but there is still a small brewery there.

Wandle Buster, a black Shire, 18.2 hands high and weighing 1 tonne: a member of Young's prize winning show team. Photo by Walter Scott, Bradford.





RamRod- Dorset Horn ram, the living trade mark of Young's Brewery, Wandsworth. Photo by Walter Scott, Bradford



*Drawing of Young's Brewery (& Ram Rod) by the
children of St Faith's Primary School in Wandsworth Town*

South Mitcham Community Association,

Young at Heart

"I used to work near Young's. Young's at Wandsworth. I worked as a machinist in the factory.

I have got a tie where if you see the chap who runs the pub he would give you a signature and you got the Ram tie. How about that. Yes I still have it....

The boys from Wandsworth schools used to be taken there for a walk round and some of the lads used to have too many sips they used to come out drunk."

S. T. Honour

"I live a couple of miles from the River Wandle. I go over to Sainsbury SavaCentre. Merton Abbey Mills, we have to go over the bridge into the Sainsbury over the Wandle."

Michael

"...and there was a cardboard factory down that end as well. Where Sainsbury is now down that front and they often polluted the river at that point as well as the dyes from the Connolly's would go in there. Lots of factories right the way along there up Strawberry Hills, at Wallington and that, they had problems there. But my husband had caught trout in there and we had trout for tea on several occasions in the past."

Holly



Postcard #1: Hops being added to Young's Brewery coppers- 1964. These coppers now form the centrepiece of the brewery museum. Photo by Walter Scott, Bradford.
Postcard #2: Cleaning tack under the watchful eye of Wandle Buster in the harness room at Young's Brewery. Photo by Walter Scott, Wandsworth.



Wandle Stories



Members of different groups including Wandsworth Mind, Commonsides Lunch Club and Age UK Merton share their Wandle related stories and experiences.

Melanie's Story

Melanie Nunzet is a member of the Sutton and Wandle Valley Ramblers' Group. She also leads a health walk every Friday around Beddington Park.

I have been leading these walks in Beddington Park for ten years now. We have our anniversary coming up in a fortnight. We are going to have quite a nice party at St Mary's church. The walk started through a walking course run by Sutton Schola Adult education. The group was very small, there were just 3 or 4 of us for quite a few years. Now we regularly have about 30 or 40 people. It's very social, and we finish at the church for refreshments. I've lived by the Wandle for quite a long time. I rented a flat in Earlsfield where the Wandle was running through the back of my garden. I then lived in Wansdworth by King George's Park, and now I live in Mitcham. My daughter went to school in Carshalton so I regularly lead walks between Mitcham and Carshalton. I discovered the Wandle trail through the Ramblers so I'm a keen Rambler with the Sutton and Wandle Valley group.

Through walking and looking around I saw Carew Manor and wanted to learn more about that and the dovecotes. I would go on historical walks or talks and listen to the local historians. A few years ago I did a project with the Mitcham Brownies where they came to the church and dressed up as orphans because Carew Manor, which is next to the church, was an orphanage for 80/ 90 years. So the little girls dressed up with mop caps and aprons. I did a lot of research at Sutton Library, at the local study centre and got the children to read about what the orphans had done and that just fascinated me. It still does.

I think they liked it a lot. They probably didn't really know what they were doing at all and were quite nervous at the beginning, but I think they loved the atmosphere of the church. Luckily it was a very sunny afternoon and we gave two performances, between the two performances they all went on a visit to the Dovecotes and went upstairs, a lady there told them about the history and I think they really loved reading about what the little girls had experienced and how different it is to their life today.

I put a little request in the local guardian for anyone who remembered or knew anything and had a good response. One from a lady in Carshalton, Sheila Norton who still lives in Carshalton and two other ladies who are sisters, one in Kent and one in Yorkshire. They had all been orphans just before the orphanage closed in 1939 so they are in their 80s. They came together, they came down here. We had a little reunion and I used their notes as well as the notes from the archives to make the story up so it was lovely to bring them together.

They had different stories about why they were there. In fact they weren't always orphans; just their parents couldn't afford to keep them well, that was further back. But these three are still in touch with each other now which is lovely.



Carew Manor, photograph by Lynne W, of <http://lynnes-diary.blogspot.co.uk>

Sheila's Story

Sheila Norton attended Royal Female Orphanage in Beddington before it was closed down in 1939.

I was in the Royal Female Orphanage in Beddington, in the late '30's. I was in the orphanage with one of my sisters, and she was a year older than me, aged seven. Mother left and so my father was unable to cope with the family and go to work. It was just a girls' orphanage, we were split. I was in the orphanage three years until the war broke out. We were evacuated to Cornwall for the whole of the war.

A lady called 'Miss Armstrong' was the Matron and we had a 'Sister' that looked after the medical side. It was regimental, we were referred by number. It was quite military really, we slept in a dormitory, there was about five beds each side of a partition. The one I was in was called 'Fielding'. We had to make our own beds. Of course it was big, it was very big to us. That's how it was, you were never lonely anymore there was always someone around you.

We had breakfast, dinner and tea, always porridge, just porridge for breakfast wasn't much, just bread and jam. I suppose we were hungry but we had enough, we got used to what we had. We weren't allowed to talk during meals, it was all quite strict but we never minded. There was no bullying, that was soon stopped and I remember one girl being sent out, I don't know where they sent her to but she had to leave.

It was gymslips for the winter and a dress for the summertime. We had that 'forage' type hat, hoods, lace up shoes, all passed down. We went to Hackbridge School, so we had to walk across the park, always in two's with our cloaks and our hoods. We had to knit and we had to sew to perfection, you know, we were really taught well, and I read

a lot, I was a reader from an early age, which I loved. I hated the swimming pool, that was far too cold but we had to go in. We used to climb trees, which we loved to do, we had a lot of fun. We had dolls and we used to walk around the grounds, playing with our dolls. We'd make our own prams out of boxes (laughs) with the string attached for our dolls. We just used to play together and it was fun.

My father used to come to visit us once a month, we didn't go out. He'd come about once a month. He'd come on that fete day and we were allowed to go on the 'chairplanes' and the swing boats as they were then. We went and bought our tuck, sweets, we were allowed tuck once a month, six ounces, so that was always a big day.

We went to church next door to the orphanage, at St Mary's. We enjoyed going to church that was a good outlet for us, we went three times on a Sunday and of course I loved singing so I enjoyed it. They built on a part especially for the girls in the church, which was nice, we had our own pews.

Christmas was wonderful because they used to ring a bell and we all had one present, off the big tree, which was lovely. To each other we gave a book that we'd read ourselves, or perfume that we liked, all things that we'd used ourselves that somebody liked, we wrapped up and gave as presents so we always had big piles of presents on our plate which was as good as having new.

Penny's Story

Sometimes I might go to Waddon Ponds for pleasure, but often I might be walking or cycling through from Purley Way on my way to or from Croydon on the bus or tram from Wandle Park. The path along that part of the Wandle is very pleasant and wooded, so a haven for wildlife. The flood involved all the residents trying to sandbag houses in Richmond Road where I lived. Later we went to the part of the river where it flows into Beddington Park, under Beddington Lane. By this time they had opened the sluice gate in Guy Road, resulting in the subsiding of the flood water from Richmond Green and down to us. However, there were tiny river creatures that had got left on the paths by the river in the park. "The banks had burst, but then as it subsided little creatures were stranded on the lawn and paths." My housemate and I tried to put as many back in the river as we could.

Arthur's Story

In the past there were eels in the Wandle, but no other fish. Eels live in murky water and couldn't survive there now. Pies and mash and jellied eels were a good meal in those days.

Aurthur, Wandsworth Mind



River Wandle, Stronghold of the Eels by Jane Porter

Memories of Soap

Age UK Merton member, Iris Smith, shares her memories of the soap factory.

I have memories of that soap factory in Merton. I used to do voluntary work for a geriatric hospital in Wandsworth and they used to give me a lot of these lovely boxes of soap, fancy ones and things for prizes for the tombola and so yes I knew them and I think Sylvia's right I think that factory's still there, making soap, yes...



Commonside Lunch Club, Mitcham Princes Trust

Members of the Commonside Lunch Club, a club for older people enjoyed an interesting afternoon of sharing stories, thoughts and tales on the river Wandle. Some of the stories of the members of the group can be found below.

Andy Hodge

I was in and around the Wandle all the time as youngster, with my jam jar with a piece of string tied to the top and my net to get sticklebacks. I used to take them home very proud and my mum would take one look at them and pour them down the drain which was a bit of a shame! I was always told don't go near The Wandle because if you fall in there we'll have to take you to hospital because you'll be dead! It wasn't the cleanest but my attitude was if fish can live there, then it can't be that bad.

Opposite Merton bus garage, where the Sainsbury's now is, 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 and get covered in foam because the foam used to be anything up to about 2 foot deep along that bit, and if there was a good wind it would blow the tops off and there would be soap suds blowing all over the place in a high wind cos the mills were doing all this sort of stuff and obviously the cleaning agents were getting into the water which of course didn't do much good for the water.

“...there would be soap suds blowing all over the place!”

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!



Zain Abidin

I used to live near Wandle Park near the river. I used to go for a run every morning and it wasn't really good at the time but now it looks really cool. Cause they're fixing and they're planting flowers. You can see more chairs that people can sit down on, and they're building more places for kids to play.

Sometimes I go for a run, so it makes me feel really happy especially the flowers and the planting and everything, it's so organised and nice and clean.

Nathaniel King

Before I was born my grandfather actually used to work in a factory that went on to become a tanning centre, obviously this is before I was born so I don't know what the factory was producing at the time, I just know he worked there. Then my grandmother and my grandfather moved to Jamaica for a bit.

Whilst growing up we used to go to Merton Abbey Mills cos they had the markets there on weekends and stuff. They actually seemed pretty cool, there was lots of different stalls and all sorts of things like food, drink, clothes. One time we went there I ended up getting a birthstone. I'm born in

February so my birthstone's amethyst, so one of the things we bought was a birth tone, a little amethyst

for me. It's so close I could just go down there this weekend if I feel so inclined.

Robbie Smith

I like the River Wandle, it smells really nice, it smells like zaflora and that's what my mum uses and I like that smell. So, as soon as I step out my house I smell that. There's a footbridge which has the river underneath it and then the park's right behind it. I take my nephew and nieces to the park and they really like it as well. They like looking at the river, there's ducks there so they like all that kind of stuff. They never feed the ducks, nah, my nephew's too scared!

Kathleen

When I got older, I worked on the factory estate cleaning and very late at night we used to go through the factories, walk right through them all. There were so many factories there and it was really lovely.

Michael's Story

My father Harold Pantlin worked at Connolly's leather factory which he said was also known as Paxton's, I haven't found that in the books, but he always used to say I work for Paxton's.

Near the Wandle bank which is by the side of Merton bus garage and just a little distance from what is now the Sainsbury's but used to be the new Merton board mills when I was a kid. He worked in the factory, for 51 years he called himself a leather dresser, basically he was paint spraying cow hides for use for anything from car seats to handbags. He worked there all those years, he started very young.

He even worked through the war because they classed it as essential work as he was making tank seats and things from the leather, he also engaged in fire watching there. They dropped incendiaries, very dangerous because they were all highly inflammable chemicals and paint. Fortunately they didn't get a direct hit but he used to be up on top watching the incendiaries come down, I don't know what he would have done if the thing had caught on fire.

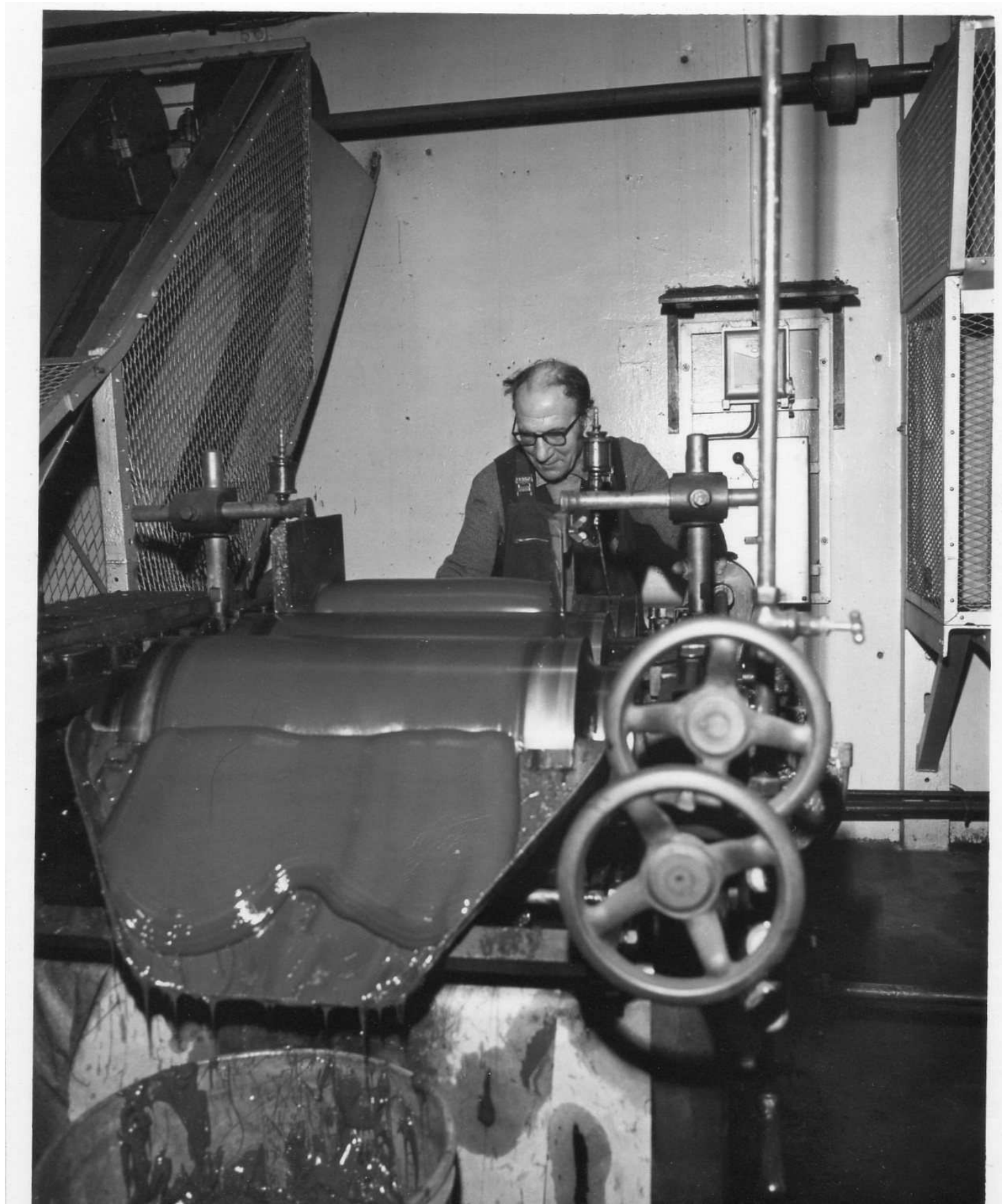
He died in 1977, he saw a lot of changes there, particularly around the 60s when they couldn't get the staff. His brothers they worked there, Frank who eventually went to Australia and now died and Jim. He was made a foreman, he's also gone.

Harold Pantlin got a job there, I think it was after the first world war, he used to be an attendant, a first aider in the army and when he left that he got a job as an attendant they used to call it, at Tooting Bec asylum, not psychiatric nurses, an attendant, and then later on he moved and joined them at Paxton's, Connolly's leather.

The family home was at All Saints road which is very near Wandle bank, it was probably 20 years ago, you couldn't get through, All Saints road was a cul-de-sac, so although he only lived 2 minutes walk from the factory he had to go all the way round up to Haydons Road and round South Road because what was in between was the vicarage. Parson lived there, now it's all been changed and now it's a through route, really it was a surprise to me

He worked nights, he spent his life working nights so it was like he'd disappear in the evening and then he'd come home at dawn. When I was a young child it was like a strange man coming back covered in coloured paint what he'd been spraying and smelling of all these chemical. It was a really hard, hard old job, and he had to carry the hides on a pole on his shoulder, very manual work. All of them who worked there, except his father thought he died of heart trouble, but all the brothers and me think our father died of cancer and I'm sure it was because of the chemical they were breathing in, very hard conditions, no canteen and he told me how strict they were on time keeping in the 1930s.

They actually had a hooter that I learned to recognise and hear. We lived in Tooting Broadway and you could hear this thing in the morning go 'hoot' and that was the sort of signing on time they had to be there and then they did another big hoot to tell you when to shut down- when it was time to go home. And he told me about the depression in the 30s he took my mother on a day trip to Dieppe and they were delayed and they got back late, and he overslept and he got there after the hooter and they sent him home, they said "if you can't get here on time, no pay, go home, we'll get someone else," yknow, they were really tough.



Photograph used with the kind permission of Michael Pantlin, who says this about it: "it shows my late father Harold Charles Pantlin 1909 - 1977 at work in the mill as he called it in Connolly's (Paxton's) leather factory. I estimate around 1970"

Jack's Story

Jack, Wandsworth Mind

I remember about four or five years ago I was really upset on one occasion because someone else in the house was ill, and I thought to myself I've just got to get out of the house. I went to the Wandle just by the Southside, and I was feeling really upset. I just stared at the Wandle and looked at it as I sat on a bench. For a while I was facing the road, but then I looked at the Wandle and the tranquillity and beauty of that little spot of the Wandle, very near Wandsworth town centre, really did a lot for me and I stayed there. It may have been raining or not, I can't remember, but I just looked at the Wandle and it had a real calming, soothing effect, and after 2 hours in that mental state I got back to normal, and I just came back to the house. No one else knew I went there but it had that real effect on me

I moved into Wandsworth in 2003 and I know how close I am to the Wandle, but I never really explored in all these years, because I imagined in my head that it was like the grand union canals, completely full of rubbish. You wouldn't want to live near a place full of rubbish, as bad as that. Then there's the worry of going along canals in case you meet one to one with somebody who's unknown and you don't exactly feel safe. If I felt safe enough I would enjoy the resource of the Wandle and be exploring the walks that it has to offer. I think any effort you pay to make the Wandle as beautiful and scenic as possible, and well preserved in terms of a natural resource by cleaning the water, by cleaning the rubbish, and by paring back the overgrown vegetation, all that would be brilliant.

But at the same time you need the publicity for people who could enjoy the place, the walks, and that it's safe. I felt perfectly safe that day I was really upset.

I spent a lot of time on my own and sometimes I can get extremely stressed with what goes on in my head. That day I was so upset I had to do something and I just sat on that bench. I think it was about half an hour facing the traffic and then I was just turning around and looking at the Wandle and it had a wonderful calming effect.

It was like going into a magical wood. It had that feeling to it that it was enchanted

Coming to the present, well, when we went to the Wilderness Island about a month ago, it was fantastic. That picture up there really sums up how much of a good time we had and going to the Wilderness Island, it was like going into a magical wood. It had that feeling to it that it was enchanted, and then we went off to finish the walk and ended up in Carshalton having a meal, so that was a really positive experience and it also brought me back to my happy childhood because believe it or not although I went to children's homes, my childhood was the happiest time of my life and going to Wilderness Island reminded me of me when I was a child going into woods. It was bringing back memories of a really good time in my life.

I think it was the experience on Wilderness Island I enjoyed the most. It was just the right moment in my mind to be going there but it's the effort they made to make it enjoyable for the

public. If it was spewed with rubbish it would have spoiled it but it was left in just the right state, and it just reminded me of my childhood memories, because I used to climb trees, so it brought me back to that time in my life and that to me healed me slightly and made me more whole and that's what a well preserved natural resource can do for people

I'd say to other people "explore it!" but we do need to reassure people that it is a safe place to go because a lot of people would go with someone else, but not on their own, and it takes organising to go with someone else. So I want the council to make sure that the public can be assured that it's a sufficiently safe place to go, within reason, because these things can get well out of proportion: it may always be safe for all I know but for a lot of people that is the deterrent factor and so reassurance, and the more people go the safer it will be anyway, y' know and then it really will be an inviting place to go to.

Wandsworth Mind is a mental health Resource Centre. Its members have connected with the Wandle through its local history exhibition 'Achievement and Hope' which took place at Wandsworth Mind on Wednesday 9th April 2014. A number of its members have personal stories and reflections connected with the river which they contributed to the exhibition. The Wandle is the central feature of Wandsworth both historically and geographically and Wandsworth Mind aims among its many objectives to further links with the local community.



Arthur's Wandle

When the factories were around most of the factory waste went into the Wandle and most of the household waste as well.

You can imagine what a state it was in. It was stagnated with old settees, armchairs, bikes and bedsteads. We used to go and kill the rats with air rifles for fun.

The waste men come and pick it up now and do a good job. If you go down there now it's perfect.

Now you can see nice reeds and birds, ducks, swans and kingfishers.

In the past I walked a long way down the Wandle. Now and again I go down the Wandle near Southside.

Over the road there was a gas lantern workshop. There are loads of factories on Garratt Lane.

Where Sainsbury's was there was a big factory, I think it was something to do with electricals.

Just off Plough Lane, where the dog track is there was a Bowater factory.

I worked in a toy factory when Airfix was there, injection moulding, aeroplanes, ships. You bought them as a kit. There was a plan in them but you could design them as you wanted to. My children did.

I worked there for 7-8 years before they shut down and I was made redundant. Mecca Bingo was built on top of where the factory was.

Arthur, Wandsworth Mind

Mr Edward's Wandle

I remember when I was a young child that the first area that I took notice of was just passed Tooting Broadway going towards Colliers Wood. There used to be a paper mill there and they used to use the water from the Wandle and it used to flow like a waterfall down.

It was just a metal building and the water ran in front of it but it looked like a metal construction, like galvanised metal, there were windows and everything but you couldn't see inside of it, because it was just a metal structure really and it ran right down to the water. I don't know whether there were pipes or anything, I suppose they were underneath, they were draining the water into a certain reservoir and getting it to flow fast cos it was flowing faster than it would usually run I would think.

We went to the William Morris museum, that's the one who did the wallpaper designs. You know Prince Edward's interested in his designs? Yeah, he does furniture as well. We went to Merton Abbey Mills in Colliers Wood, I think they probably must use water there as well and they've got shops there as well from different parts of the world, they've got them from the Orient and from the West Indies and I think it was Europe as well.

Mr Edwards, Wandsworth Mind





Age UK Merton

Members of the Age UK walking group and the Memory Lane group share their fascinating and evocative memories and stories relating to the River Wandle.

Age UK Merton's aim is to ensure that everyone in Merton has the opportunity to make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances, wants and needs.

"In the early 1950s they had garden parties at morden hall park. Well known film stars used to come. If you were ordinary people you didn't get invited so you used to have to look over the wall."

"We used to go paddling in the wandle and there used to be greater crested newts we used to catch, we'd keep them in a jar and tip them back in when we went home."

"My grandad George Gosney worked for Isaac Wilson as a foreman and bricklayer and built Wilson Hospital. My uncles used to play for Mitcham Cricket, one of the oldest cricket clubs in the country."

"I'm very familiar with the Wandle because my husband was posted to Wandsworth and so we got to know the area quite well. I was also president of the League of Friends of St. John's hospital. We used to do a lot to fundraise for the hospital and so I used to write to all the big shops and all the supermarkets and ask them if they would be generous enough to give me things to raise money for the hospital. The response was usually very, very good all round the Wandle area here.

Price's candles never let us down, they always gave us lovely boxes of beautiful candles. They would deliver them, it was more or less up the road. It was a geriatric hospital for 650 patients, it was so sad, so many of them never had a visitor they didn't seem to have any relatives that seemed to bother about them. They never had any money, they couldn't buy toiletries and things that we were selling to help them. We used to get these boxes of soaps, individual tablets y'know and so I said to the hospital secretary, why don't we give them the opportunity once a month to come to the trolley when we come round and let them choose something off it, just one item, and we went round every Saturday but once a month as I say we let them choose something for nothing - a tablet of soap, toiletries and things that they needed."

Iris Smith

When I was a student in 1970 I worked at what was Hadfields, then Carson Paripan took it over. It rivalled Dulux. It was a bit smelly, they had trouble storing things.

They made the pale tint base that colour was added to later. You had to check in and check out with a card. Some people would get other people to check in for them. There were guards on the gates to prevent theft. I worked in the warehouse, picking orders on the pallets. By the Wandle, where Sainsburys is you could see all the rags and newspaper stacked up. Opposite the bus depot.

The river was full of foam there, sometimes it was about 2 feet high, white foam. Of course, nothing lived in it then.

Well I knew of the River Wandle, yes. My husband was a great cricketer and he used to play in matches all round with the school and so on, so yes I heard of the Wandle.

I think on one occasion he brought me specially to the Wandle. I learned more about it I think from my husband taking me down the river, than anything else.

We travelled to Merton and then we went from there down the river as far as I can remember... on foot first and then on a boat and well that was many years ago when I did that with him.

Sylvia Wilson

"I remember the brewery at Wandsworth – Young's brewery. Beer doesn't taste the same now. It shut down 7 or 8 years ago. I had 1 or 2 brewery tours with the social club at Balham. We did a long walk – 15 miles in 83 degree heat.

It was Tooting Conservatives and Young's bewery and was in aid of St. George's hospital. That was about 33 years ago. When you used to have the brewery tours, when you got into the tap room, you could stay and drink as much as you wanted!"



Martin Richardson enjoys a moment of reflection by the Wandle on a group walk

I used to stroll round Wandsworth quite a lot and just glance over at the water, like you do, to pass time when it's away. It wasn't a very deep river anyway, it was quite shallow I believe, I don't know, cos I never went in it. We used to drink Young's beer and that goes back a long long way cos they've been there for many, many years, and most of the deliveries was done by horse and cart and they used to trek all of them, you'd see them everywhere you went really, all round London, quite an achievement I think in them days. The horses used to come out here looking really, really good. I looked at the gate quite often, saw the horses, that'd the nearest I got to Young's. - John



My cousin worked for Hatfield, Gosney, in the office at Hadfield house right on the banks of the river. The office of the paint factory. When he came out of the army he went back to work there.

When I was first married we lived in the blocks of flats by morden hall park on the 10th floor. Now they're doing more to keep it clean but years back it wasn't. We play bowls in Carshalton park and used to walk the dogs round Morden hall park."

There are two of the water wheels one at Ravensbury and one at Morden Hall Park and they're all in working condition now. My husband used to work at the side of the Ravensbury and he was a wood machinist and all their machines used to run off the water from there... We used to make skipping ropes and we used to have to put the ballbearings in and the rope

Sylvia Wilson

"There were cows in the field, that used to be a stable for the cows. Our sister Veronica was only little. She was running around, slipped and landed sat in a cowpat! She had on a green satin dress that my mum had sewed! When we lived in Tooting we came for Sunday walks. We used to fish for sticklebacks. We used to paddle. We had jam jars with bits of string round the top"





Wandle Industrial Museum

Meg's Story

Meg Thomas has worked as a curator at the Wandle Industrial Museum for twenty years. She spoke to us about some of her experiences working in the museum and the Wandle in general.

So Meg, tell me, how long has the Wandle Industrial Museum been here and how did you get involved with the Wandle Industrial Museum?

It's been on this site since 1991, but it's been in existence since 1983. I attended a meeting in Vestry Hall and Steven Ashcroft said, "Oh, I think you'll be good on the committee," and that was it!

And what's a normal day like at the museum?

Well in the morning it's working on aspects of the museum and things like that and in the afternoon we're open to the public. But we do have school visits at other days and we do go out and give talks.

Do you get a lot of people coming in who are interested in the River Wandle?

Most people who come here come here because it's about the River Wandle because they've lived around this area and sometimes it's from further afield. We had an Australian visitor yesterday.



Do you have any personal memories of the River Wandle? Do you live near here?

I live in Morden but I first became interested in the River Wandle when we had an allotment in Garrett Park through which the Wandle runs and at that time I'm afraid it was covered with foam. But it has improved greatly since then. It was interesting working at the allotments, particularly talking to the older allotment holders who as young men had fished in the river.

Do you think people are more or less interested in the river these days?

Well, I think the whole of local history has become a bit more, people are a bit more interested in local history and small, local museums like this are really very important because they hold the local history of the people.

What do you like best about working here?

Well, we have a very pleasant group of volunteers so it's very enjoyable and I enjoy working on the history of the museum and the Wandle.

Where do you get all the objects and memorabilia from for the museum?

That's a good question. They've been here as long as I have. But we did manage to acquire some blocks. Unfortunately, we haven't got any William Morris blocks. Sanderson have got those. Some of them have been given to us by people. And sometimes they've collected them. One of our volunteers was a great fan of car boot sales and he's collected particularly the snuff bottles. So the snuff bottles he gave us.

And you can still get ahold of snuff bottles then?

Well, I don't know about the bottles but you can certainly buy

snuff still. A really nice shop is in Covent Garden.

So one of the volunteers has gone then and collected some of those things? And are you recruiting volunteers all the time?

We are really trying actively to recruit more now because the workload gets a bit much and we really do need more volunteers, particularly for our Sunday opening. We're open on a Sunday afternoon now.



St Faith's School Visit to the Wandle

Children from St Faiths C of E primary school in Wandsworth took a trip to the place where the River Wandle meets the Thames in Wandsworth Town, they were joined by Meg, the curator of the Industrial Wandle Museum. Meg relayed stories of the Wandle to the interested children before they headed back to draw some Wandle-inspired pictures.

A few weeks later the children were visited by author of the Wandle Companion Bob Steel who regaled the kids with exciting personal stories relating to the River Wandle. The children then began writing their own imaginative stories on the River Wandle, these stories included a number of interesting characters and encounters along the riverside.



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Following the trip, children from St Faith's were also given a chance to share their Wandle stories, these included fishing by the river and learning more about what lives in and around its banks.

Usually I visit the River Wandle at King George's park with my mum and my dad and my two sisters.

I really like visiting the river with my family, usually we have picnics or go for walks by the Wandle. I like looking out at the wildlife, the butterflies, the wildflowers and the birds.

Layla, 10 years old





I like to go fishing at the River Wandle with my granddad. Sometimes my little brother comes too

I often go fishing with my granddad by the Wandle. I really like fishing in the sunshine, and watching other people fish. My favourite fish is the reef fish. Sometimes I go along with my little brother who is seven years old.

I also really enjoy spotting wildlife by the river such as spiders and water birds. I visit the Wandle most during fishing season. My granddad uses maggots, cheese and bread to attract the fish, however the fish most like sweetcorn. I don't like seeing rubbish in the Wandle, it upsets me as it is damaging to the fish, and to other wildlife.

Tyrese, 10 years old





Bob and the River Wandle

We asked Bob Steel author of the River Wandle Companion a number of questions about his book, and stories about the river.

What would you like your readers to take away from the book or how would you like them to use the book?

Well, I mean, it's called the Wandle Companion because in a sense it fulfils different functions. It's the sort of book you can sit down at home and dip into and find out more about whatever aspects of the river you're interested in whether that's the rivers' history or the scientific aspects of the water. It's also, I hope, a practical guide because the second half contains a detailed walk down the river that you can carry with you as you're going. The maps in there will help you to identify how the land has changed as you're going down. So the title is meant to convey that you could use it as a friend.

Do you have a favourite part of the river?

Well, I suppose I do. I like Morden Hall Park. It's hard not to because it's like an old country estate that's been fossilized there. So that's probably I think the river at its best. Beddington Park's nice, too, because it's big and it's an estate and you can imagine what it was once like. Morden Hall Park's maybe more interesting because you've still got the relics of the mills and you can imagine the river flowing through. It's almost like someone's back garden. Well, it is, really. The Hatfield family who had the estate, donated it to the National Trust, and it hasn't really changed all that much.

I mean, I think to be honest the Trust neglected it for a long time and only really themselves started to put a bit more investment into it the last ten years. I think they thought it was a bit of an albatross at one time but they have now, I think, realised there is a potential for these urban oases as well as all the country estates and so on. So, yes, I think Morden Hall Park you can capture the Wandle at its most interesting.

Is there a sight or a smell or a season that really conjures up the Wandle for you?

Well, funnily enough, when I was growing up, there was a vinyl factory at Carshalton on the river and it used to give off this acrid, sort of like an acetone kind of smell. It was quite an unpleasant smell, actually, which I very much associated with the river because this factory was right on the river and you'd get this pong, you know... I like this idea of smells being related to towns, or places. There was this lovely little poem about this place in Scotland called Kirkcaldy where they used to have this big linoleum factories, you know they imported the jute from India and apparently the stink was tremendous, the people used to be able to tell when the train was coming into town because, you'd suddenly get this awful smell.

"There were peppermint distilleries all over there and lavender distilleries..."

On a more positive note, one of the nice smells which I think is also a Wandle smell, is lavender because those places like Wallington, Mitcham and Carshalton were very important for lavender growing and also other herbs like mint, peppermint, and there were distilleries. There were

peppermint distilleries all over there and lavender distilleries, so they used some of the mill buildings to produce those, what we now I suppose would call aromatherapy products. So that's a more pleasant aroma.

What would you like to see happen to the Wandle in the future?

Well, I think it would be really nice to complete the Wandle trail, there's just a few small stretches now, one of them's here in Wandsworth, you know, the last bit near the Brewery, where there's no public access. A tremendous amount has been achieved already. So that would be one thing that I think would be good to see that last stretch.

I think, I mean, maybe also, I think there's still scope to develop the wildlife habitat. I think a lot has been achieved already. My friend Derek who's very keen on this, has always said that at least one of the two banks of the river should be kept free of public access so that it's more of a wildlife sanctuary. So there maybe two things. But I do quite like this idea of the Wandle, it's a very urban river, I mean I think it should be used by all sorts of people.

"Having a clean river that can be used by all sorts of different people, I think that's really the mission statement of the river."

I don't fish, myself, but there's a tiny picture at the back of the book that shows a guy fishing in the river with Merton bus garage in the background, is a nice image of how I think the Wandle should be because it captures the fact that it's a very urban river, it's a recreational lung for people and it's somewhere where people spend their leisure time as it threads through the city. So I think really more of the same really because I think an enormous

amount has been achieved in the last 30 years. There's always these serious pollution incidents that happen now and again, you know accidents happen and so on, but you know, having a clean river that can be used by all sorts of different people, I think that's really, the mission statement of the river.

Bob visits St Faiths

During his visit, Bob was asked many questions by the children of St Faith's. Here are a few of them.

Who inspired you to write?

Who inspired me? The river, really, if the river's a person. It wasn't really a person that inspired me, I think it was really the fact that I'd spent so much time in the river or on the river banks when I was young, fishing, just playing around and looking for creatures in the river... And I think the other thing is as I got older the river changed so much. It changed quite quickly, you know, from quite a dirty river to now people are much more interested in using it as a place to go enjoy themselves, and walk along the banks. So I could see that the river has changed very quickly and I thought, well there's quite an interesting story there. No one else had really written a book about the river for maybe 30 years so it was an opportunity and when I stopped teaching I had time to do it. So that was it, really

When you were a kid, did you ever get blood sucked from a leech?

I don't think I did, no. I was quite careful to avoid them. I don't think they were as dangerous as they're made out to be. You know, sometimes when you're young, you have this idea of what something might be like. Someone tells you about something, you build it up into something quite scary, you know. "Oh, bloodsuckers," you know, you could end up having all your blood sucked. I don't think they were that dangerous, really. But they did look a bit sinister because they hid under stones and then they kind of had this way of swimming. Have you ever watched an eel swimming? Bloodsuckers are a bit like eels; they're a



bit smaller, you know, they sort of wave along like this. We used to scream and rush away from them. But they weren't really that scary, I don't think.

How do you feel when you go to the river?

These days, I feel really good. It's a positive thing. I like cycling on the river. I quite like going in the early morning or the evening when it's quite quiet. You know, some stretches you can be on your own, you don't see anybody. And in some places you could actually just be in the countryside because in some bits, believe it or not, you can't even see any buildings; in the summer, when the trees are out. So, yeah, it feels good. Although, you know, and again, someone was asking about this. In some places, there's lots of litter and mess and that's a bit depressing but you know we've always had that problem. Some people take care of their environment and some people don't. Hopefully we will.

So when you told us you got pushed in, by your friend, well, by your brother, how come you wasn't ill because you normally get ill by rivers.

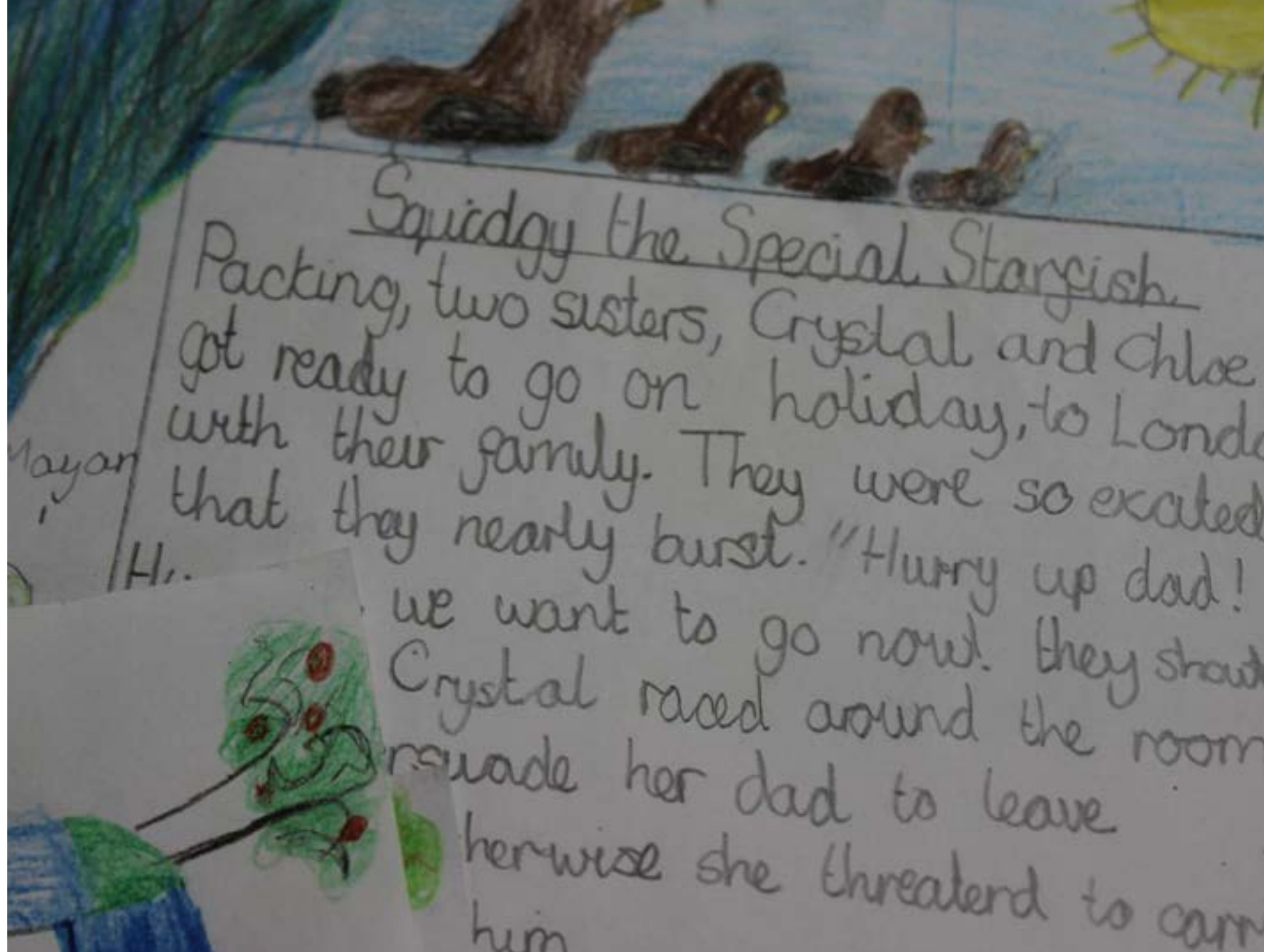
Well, I wasn't swallowing the water. I mean, I think these days we're all worried about things like Weil's disease, you get all these diseases from the water. But we'd never really heard of all these things and I think a lot of the time, maybe people are extremely over cautious these days about children, you know, running into trouble or getting diseases. I didn't think any of us ever really got ill, but we did spend quite a bit of time in the river it was quite normal for us to come home with wet feet because we used to wear our wellies into the Wandle.

But you know, if you've ever walked in the river, there are some bits that are really shallow and then all of a sudden you go straight down to a deep bit, you know a muddy bit,

some place you sink in the mud a bit. The Wandle's a bit like that. Probably even more this end where it's a bit deeper. So, you need to be careful, though, if you go in the river. We were a bit silly once or twice, we didn't have any grown-ups around to pull us out if we did get into trouble.



River Wandle Stories by the Children of St Faith's CofE



Inspired by Bob Steel's stories from leeches, to the river's history, the children of St Faith's wrote their very own imaginative and at times very dark River Wandle stories. A selection are included here.

Bolt and the Blood-Sucking Leeches

by Max

Last week, a water vole known to his friends as Bolt, managed to find a warm home with a human called James. Growing up next to the River Wandle, in an old but comfortable caravan, Bolt loved nothing more than racing down the River Wandle in his hamster ball.

One sunny afternoon we had a picnic. But there was an accident, he fell in the water as he drifted away he thought he'd never see James again.

He slept the night but when he woke up there were big, blood sucking leeches, he got so scared he fainted, his blood went cold, his heart stopped. When he woke up he had super strength.

He swam through the swamp past the ducks. And finally he found his owner dying by leeches, so Bolt killed the leeches and saved him.

Leech Disaster

by Natalie

The bright and shiny, glowing and friendly sun was out on a calm and peaceful day. A gentle breeze danced among the trees. There lived a mother, father a girl called Jess and a boy called Alex, who lived right in front of the River Wandle. They had four charming dogs and lived in a mansion.

Later that day their five best friends came over to have lunch and play. "Lets play by the river! Just make sure no one falls in!" exclaimed Jess.

"Good idea!" said Orla, who was one of Jess's best friends.

"Leo's tag!" shouted Alex.

Suddenly Jess tripped over a rock and landed in the river.

"Help, help! I can't swim. Ahh LEECHES!"

Manny and the Factory

Worker

By Lucy

One lonely afternoon, the factory worker came home and saw his fish. The fish is called Manny. The owner decided to go to the River Wandle with Manny. He said he has to let him go in the River Wandle.

He was thrown in the river and knocked out for two days! Fortunately he woke up and he felt happy.

He noticed that he saw spiders around him and he flopped himself back into the river so he didn't die.

Manny was like a free bird, but he is a fish. He was swimming then he came across the kingfisher! He was frightened. The kingfisher said "no fear child, I am a former kingfisher. I cannot fly my wing is broken so I only eat worms. I hope to see you again."

Under the Wandle Manny went to find a home. He found an abandoned log so he slept until he had enough energy to start again and he loved seeing the Kingfisher and his fellow fish friends. He loved being in the Wandle and he soon forgot about his owner who comes with bread for the fish and he always sees Manny happy and cheerful.



Squidgy the Special Starfish

Packing, two sisters, Crystal and Chloe got ready to go on holiday, to London with their family. They were so excited, that they nearly burst. "Hurry up dad! Hurry up, we want to go now! they shouted with joy. Crystal raced around the room, trying to persuade her dad to leave immediately, otherwise she threatened to carry on harrasing him.

Half an hour later, they were on their flight to London. The girls slept like new born babes on the plane. After a while, it was morning since their last nap.

At last, they eventually reached London. "Horray! Horray, we're here!" Chloe



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Squidgy the

Special Starfish

By Mayan and Keisha

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At last, they eventually reached London. "Horray! Horray, we're here!" Chloe celebrated. Rushing of the plane, the girls sniffed the sweet air of London, and got

the coach to their hotel, with thier family carrying the heavy luggage.

The next morning, they went to visit the Wandle. "Why is it dirty? I thought swimming pools were meant to be clean," Crystal said in a confused manner.

Rising to the top of the river, a starfish appeared out of the blue. It stared at them suspiciously. Hypnotising them, so they could understand him. (hello) The starfish told them that the Wandle is shutting down. "Help me save the Wandle!" moaned the starfish helplessly.

Rushing with malice, Chloe and Crystal marched down to the Government's office. "How dare you shut down the Wandle!" exclaimed Crystal angrily.

Whipping out the starfish, she forced the leader to look into it's eyes. A second later, the starfish's eyes started twirling trying to hypnotize the man. "Blee blah bloo bah bee hoo bah (you are not going

to shut down the River Wandle) the starfish said, eager to change the leader's mind. Suddenly, the starfish stopped. The man repeated his words and said that he was not going to shut the Wandle.

Soon enough, Chloe and Crystal had to go home back to their country; so did the starfish. "I am going to miss you so so much!" cried Chloe to the starfish. "Thanks for all your help," Crystal said happily. They said their goodbye's to the starfish and went, never forgetting their dear friend Squidgy the Starfish and their promises and secrets.

Deep Death

By Layla

"Crash, bang, wollah" Some people think in the future there will be flying cars and jetpack shows... well, they are right. Don't get too excited about what I am going to tell you but... I'm dead. My great great granddaughter, Lexi is roaming the earth with all the cool electric devices and what not, but anyway, someone very special was coming and now she's here, so I am going to tell you her story.

It all started when Lexi was walking down the road, well, she was flying, however, at that time they had buried the wandle and the Thames so Lexi had never seen them... until now. She noticed something really strange. When she looked over at the smooth stoned river as always, something that was blue was showing. It was aqua and it salty, so she went to investigate it.

Suddenly, a mad man jumped out of the blue and pulled Lexi in. She screamed in horror, it was a dreadful sight, but everyone had to die. Lexi drowned. That was that.

The End.

Jim and the Leech

By Anon,

One lovely glistening day Jim went to the river which was at the back of his house to play with his friends. Then Jim put his foot in the water and got bitten by a leech, a black menacing creature. Jim kicked off the leech and came out of the river.

The next day after school he came to the back garden where the river was, he dipped his toe in the water but as quick as a flash a leech popped out with its sharp pointy teeth but small, and missed Jim.

An hour later he came at midday to see if they were still there, so he put his feet in and they never came but then they came and bit him again.

Soon afterwards he went to the pharmacy to get anti-leech cream so he went back home to test the cream and it worked. So the leeches never came again.

above the meandering,
Wandle the pure
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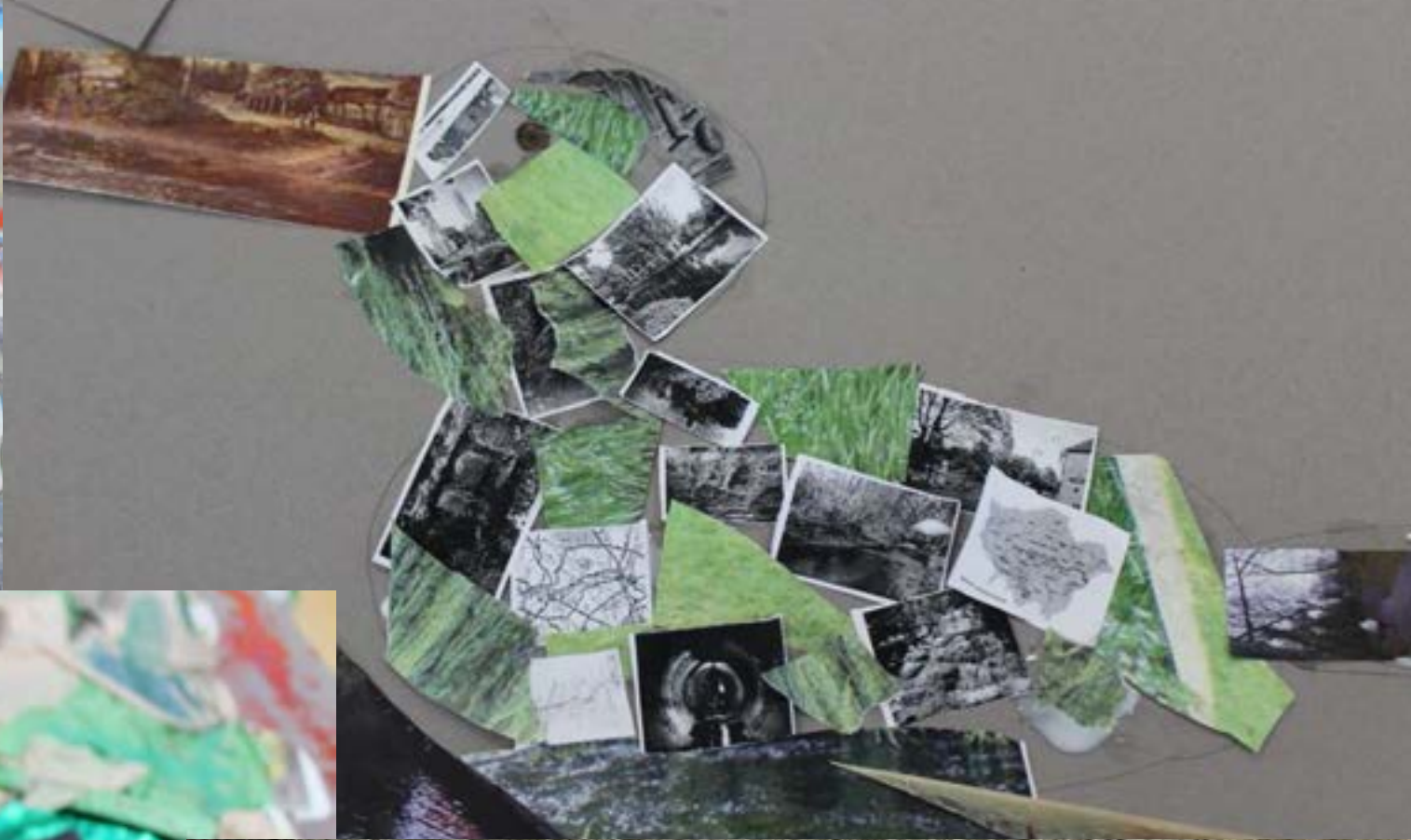
I love listening to the sound of the water, especially beside the the waterfall. It's really pretty and smells nice.

I like watching the ducks swim in the water especially when it's a sunny day.

I pass the River Wandle every day on my way to school.

Sometimes I see rubbish floating on the surface and it makes me upset as it isn't good for the fish.







Harris Academy

As part of local community week, students from year 8 and year 9 at Harris Academy got involved with River Wandle: Flowing through Time. The students went on a trip to Morden Hall Park, during which they found out more about the local history and the heritage of the mills. Following their trip, they spent the rest of the school day getting involved in creating their very own Wandle inspired screen prints.

While the students designed their prints, some of the young people shared their own Wandle stories! Read on for a selection of them.





Tracy and the River Wandle

I really enjoyed finding out about the Wandle's history, especially the industry part and learning about the mills. I always walk through but I never thought about its history or what used to be by the river.

I ride my bike across Morden Hall Park up to the tram stop on the other side with my best friend Janya. In summer we like to sit by the rose garden and sometimes we like to put our feet in the water. We also have water fights and sometimes I have a picnic with my family.

I remember one story I have about the Wandle. When I was with Janya and my other friends, one of my friends dropped her keys in the water. We all saw it in slow motion slipping and we tried to save it, but we couldn't! Then we got a stick and tried to fish the keys out. It was really funny; we thought one of our friends would fall in. But luckily we got the keys in the end and none of us got that wet!

Tracy, Year 9, Harris Academy













I used to go to the adventure park bit in Morden Hall Park, it was lots of fun. I really liked the zip wire. The natural woodland play area. I usually go with friends; we go cycling from Morden Hall Park to Deen City Farm. We cycle by parts of the river. In summer it's really nice to see the butterflies and birds and little flies.

Tanya, Year 9

I really enjoyed the trip. I don't really know the Wandle very well but I would like to explore it more. I remember I once went on a primary school trip to Morden Hall Park in autumn, the leaves had all turned gold and brown and yellow and some of them were floating on the water in the Wandle.

There are a lot of things you could probably do by the Wandle, you could go fishing, ride your bike, have a picnic, hang out with your friends.

Isaac, Year 9

I remember I went on a school trip in year 5, it was about the water cycle, in Morden Hall Park, we had to go in the water, one boy in my class, Alex, slipped and fell into the river, when my teacher tried to help him up she fell in herself. It was really funny. I always remember that. It was in summer about 5 years ago. I go every now and again with my younger brother in Carshalton after school, we feed the ducks.

Shannon, Year 9



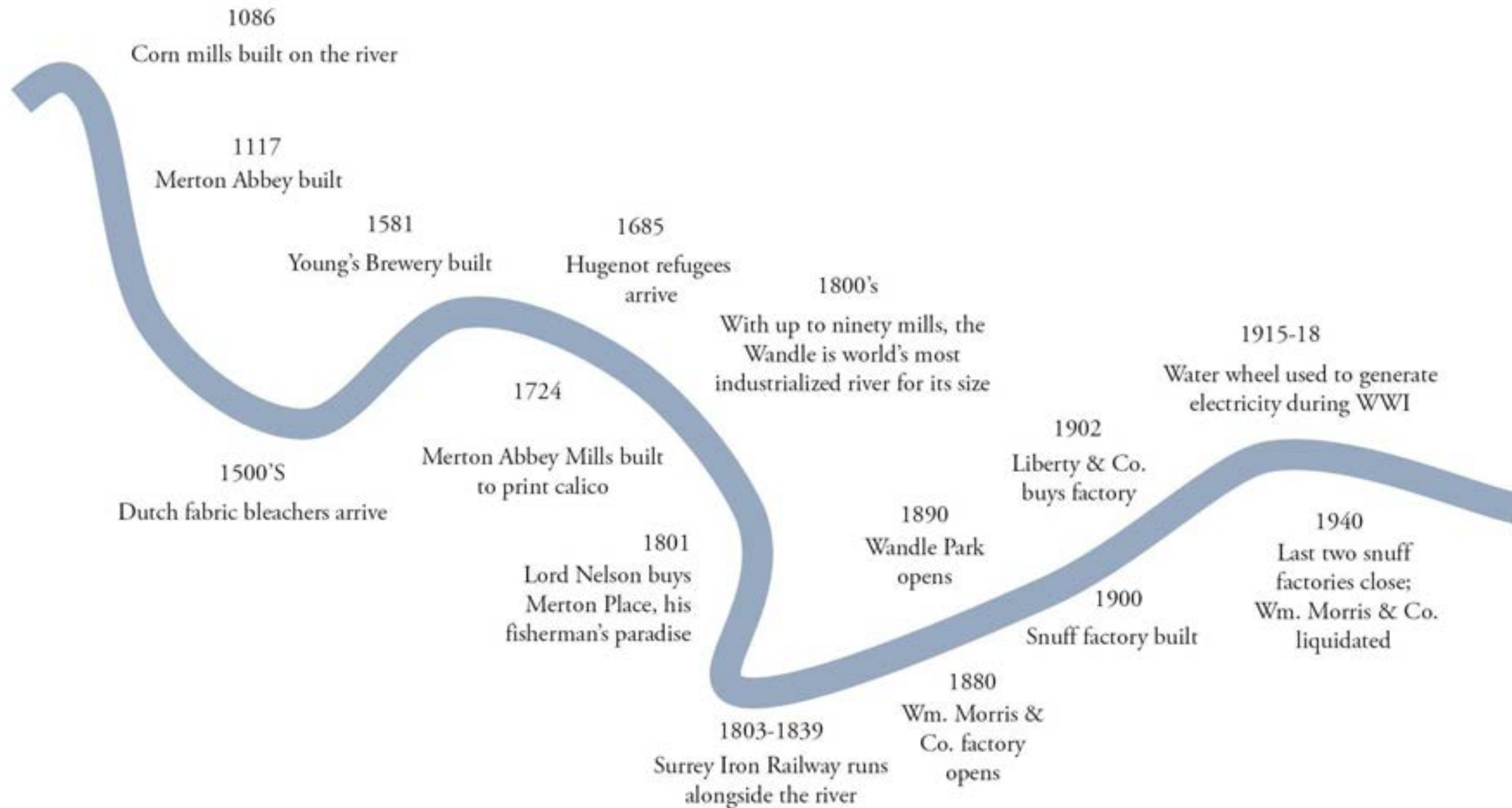


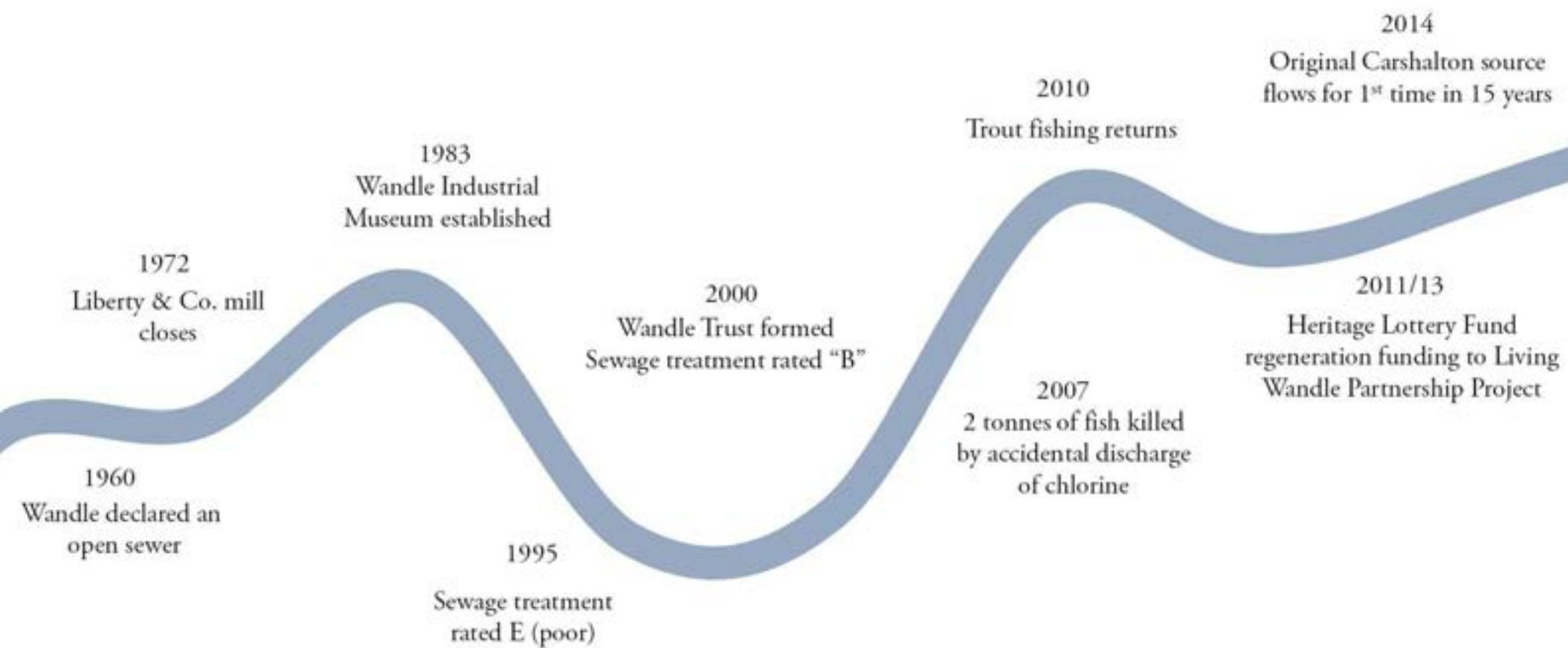
River Wandle: Flowing through Time

Over the past year we have embarked on a wonderful exploration of our River Wandle through the stories, memories and experiences shared by the many inspiring people involved in our oral history project.

As the river continues to flow through time and through lives, we hope that people will share and cherish the special connections and memories made.

River Wandle: Flowing through Time





Thank You

We would like to say a special thank you to everyone who shared their stories with us and contributed their work to our book.

Jane Porter
Bob Steel
Meg Thomas
Duncan Soar
Wandsworth Mind
Wandle Industrial Museum
Age UK Merton
Commonside Lunch Club
Melanie Nunzet
Sambrook's Brewery
Young at Heart, South Mitcham Community Assoc.
Young's Brewery
Harris Academy School
St Faith's CofE Primary School
Young at Heart
Wandsworth Heritage Service
Sacha Grigg-Tejani
Shannon Lindo
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Sharon McElroy
Margaret Salvatore
Belinda Robinson
Carol Rahn
Jamila Burke
Joanna Ecclestone
Rebecca Watts, Louise Crothall and Tina Corr

and everyone else who has been involved in our Flowing through Time
oral history project

from
Rukshana Ali and Nicky Judd at

Groundwork London



A Living Wandle Publication

Edited by Saira Niazi

Produced in partnership with the Living Wandle Landscape Partnership Scheme
& supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund.



Living Wandle
Landscape Partnership







Groundwork London has embarked on a fascinating journey through time following the River Wandle as it meanders through the lives of the many people living and working on its banks. Over the past year we have collected an abundance of stories, past and present, relating to the River Wandle. These stories have been shared by different people across the community; from school children who are newly discovering its secrets to elderly people who know them all too well. Throughout time the Wandle has inspired people from all walks of life, from artists to writers, to wanderers and the curious. This book is a collection of some of the most interesting stories we came by.

A Living Wandle Publication



Living Wandle
Landscape Partnership

