



WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION SHEET supporting KS 1/2 History & Geography:

H KS2 - a study of...a site that is significant in the locality

Gg KS1 – use basic geographical vocabulary to refer to rivers

Gg KS2 – understand key aspects of ... rivers

THE RIVER WANDLE

The River Wandle flows through the London Boroughs of **Croydon, Sutton, Merton and Wandsworth** where it joins the River Thames. It's main **sources** are from chalk springs along the foothills of the North Downs around the **Carshalton** and **Croydon** areas, although several of these are now dried up. The existing spring sources can be found in **Carshalton Ponds, Beddington Park, Waddon Ponds** and more recently **Wandle Park**. The river flows for 19 kilometres (12 miles) falling 58 metres (136 feet) over its length. As a result it is fast flowing compared to neighbouring tributaries such as the **Graveney, Norbury Brook** and the **Bourne** streams. This made it very attractive to be used to drive water wheels. It is no surprise that in 1805 the Wandle was described as *“the hardest worked river for its size in the world”* due to the numerous water mills along it. It also had the reputation of being the best trout fishing river in the country, frequently used by Lord Nelson when visiting Merton.

The origin of the name of the river is unclear. It is likely that Wandle, and that of Wandsworth, is derived from Saxon *“Wendlesworth”* meaning “Wendle’s settlement”. The charter of AD 693 called it the *hlida burnon* or *highbourne* meaning “loud stream”. The earliest reference to the current name is in 1586.

In 1853 Frederick Braithwaite undertook a survey of the Wandle’s **hydrology**, studying the water level measured by the amount of **discharge**. He found the discharge rate at Earlsfield to be 164 cubic feet per second (cu ft/s). By 1960 this had dropped to only 60 cu ft/s but in 2010 it had risen slightly to 73 cu ft/s. This is a reflection of the changing use of the river water, and by channel adjustments especially in the Beddington area.

Additional sources of water in the Wandle comes from the site of the **Beddington sewage works** which is now closed down, but a new water source has been reclaimed in the newly landscaped Wandle Park, which is the furthest visible spring.

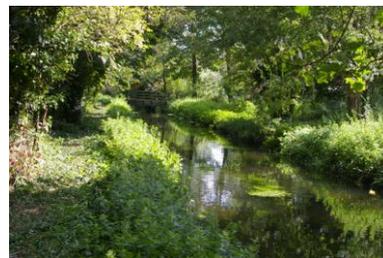
Disputes over the water from the Wandle were common as users wanted to get the greatest flow that they could to drive their mills. Diverting the water channel was made by creating diversions or cuts off the river. A number of these still exist today such as the Paper Mill Cut within the **Watermeads**, the Mill Cut on **Mitcham Green** and Rucker’s Cut found in **Morden Hall Park** (created in 1769. Even at Liberty’s Mill (now Merton Abbey Mills) and downstream past the former Morris Works (now Sainsbury’s/M&S Superstore) the channel is manmade, the original course of the Wandle being what we now call the Pickle Ditch near the Tandem Centre. Some of these cuts resulted in Mill Ponds such as in Ravensbury Park and Beddington Park.

Some suggested follow-up activities and research:

- Why were water mills attracted to the River Wandle?
- Why did the Graveney tributary have hardly any industrial activity?
- List the **sources** of the River Wandle.
- Explain what these river words mean...?

CHANNEL COURSE DISCHARGE SPRING TRIBUTARY CUT

- Why were there “**water disputes**” about the River Wandle? How could these disputes be settled? Perhaps you could play act this debate!
- Find a map of the River Wandle, and try to find the places mentioned in the information overleaf.
- Find out more about how **mill ponds** were used.
- What is **hydrology** the study of?



What the Wandle Industrial Museum can do for you:

The Museum is able to cater for school groups, either at the museum itself or by visiting your school, to learn more about the **layout of the River Wandle and its history**. We also have a large **scale model of the Wandle river valley showing the landscape and tributaries**, and locating the main water mills.

For further enquiries or to make a booking please contact us as below:

The Wandle Industrial Museum 020 8648 0127 or email office@wandle.org