

THE WANDLE VALLEY & THE SURREY IRON RAILWAY

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BOOKLET. "THE RIVER WANDLE" Published by Sutton Libraries.

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SURREY MAP. c1760. Xerox copy.

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THE SURREY IRON RAILWAY

INTRODUCTION & NOTES ON THE ROUTE.

MAP.

ARTICLE FROM THE RAILWAY MAGAZINE. 1950.

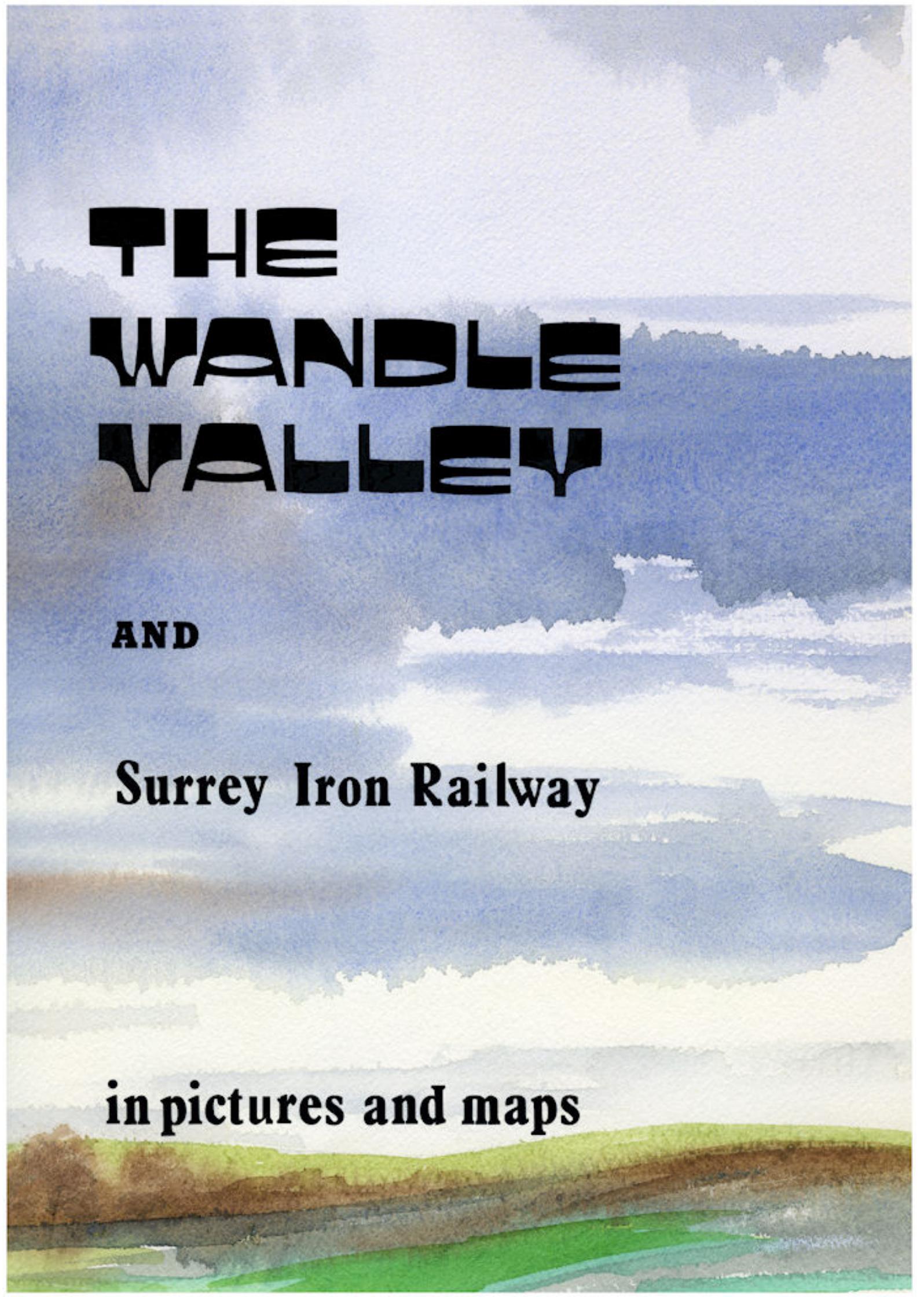
ARTICLE FROM SURREY LIFE. 1979.

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XEROX COPIES, SNAPS, POSTCARDS.

A watercolor-style landscape painting. The sky is filled with soft, layered clouds in shades of light blue, white, and pale yellow. Below the sky, there are rolling hills and a valley. The foreground shows a green field with a brownish-grey path or stream winding through it. The overall style is soft and painterly.

THE WANDLE VALLEY

AND

Surrey Iron Railway

in pictures and maps

The booklet "The River wandle", published in 1978 by the London Borough of Sutton is, as far as I know, the only history of the river that has appeared since Mr. Hobson's book, also called the "River wandle" was published in 1923. This book, long out of print, but obtainable through the library system, deals mainly, as I recall, with the flora and fauna of the river as opposed to its industries and general history which I have endeavoured to seek out through my survey during the 1960's.

The wandle has always been an industrialised river, and to some degree still is as far as factories along its banks are concerned, although of course it no longer provides the motive power that was necessary before the age of steam to drive the mill machinery.

Not many relics are left now of these past industries, most being destroyed over the years for various reasons, but there are still a few that can be seen, although even some of these late survivors are fast being demolished to make way for modern needs. There seems to have been a purge around the early and mid sixties to get rid of as many of these old buildings as quickly as possible due possibly to the building boom that seems to be proceeding apace. An example of this wanton destruction is the demolition of Pimm's Mill at Wandsworth, shown in one of my drawings. This mill was an example, and a fine one at that, of an early 19th century weather boarded mill, the last survivor on the riverside. It was of considerable historic value and should have been retained.

Another example is the old Chocolate mill at Hackbridge, a building which was listed as of historical value. I found this mill demolished one Sunday morning when I went to get a picture of it. That was one I lost. There may have been others. The old aqueduct at Wandsworth known to thousands who travelled beneath it every day of their working lives. It was part of the valley. It was built in the eighteen seventies as a high level sewer, and although standing for best part of 100 years, was pulled down on the strength of it being unsafe.

Not all demolitions were the work of official vandalism, some being the work of unofficial vandals, like the Grange, a beautiful old Georgian building in Mitcham. This was fired by local yobbos in the early 1950s, and not rebuilt. This also I failed to get a picture of. There were two Georgian millers' houses nearby. One was fired and destroyed, the other has recently been restored. Millers Mead at Colliers Wood is another original millers house which was also fired and all but destroyed, again by louts, but it has since been renovated. I do have a picture of that. However, in spite of all this destruction, I have managed to capture quite a few scenes and buildings, many of which are still in situ, and I hope will remain so.

If the booklet is read in conjunction with the map, the pictures, and the comments thereon, the reader should be able to form a fairly accurate picture of what the wandle valley was like in days gone by, and also what it looks like today,

I have also taken, over a period of time a number of colour slides of the river and its environs. For these pictures see File No.1. Slide No's 144 to 190 inclusive. The pictures and drawings in the book have been mainly taken from the slides and other pictures, and some are from memory. They are an assortment of water-colours, pen and ink, pastel and oil pastel, and are intended to convey what the river looked like as I recall it.

It should be mentioned that the name wandle, wandsworth, take their names from the Saxon Worth, or living place. Wandle or Wendle has been traced to a Saxon tribe who lived hereabouts, hence Wendle, Wendlesworth, living place of the Wendles, corrupted into modern day wandle, wandsworth.

There are two tributaries of the wandle, one the River Graveney, taking its name from the family of de Graveney, one time of the Manor of Graveney near Tooting. This little stream rises somewhere in the Norbury area, and makes its way through part of Streatham and Tooting and joins the wandle in Garratt Park nearby Earlsfield. The other is the Pickle Ditch. Where this unlikely name comes from I do not know. This is a much smaller and shorter stream than the Graveney. Rises somewhere in Mitcham, flows around the Phipps Bridge area, and can be seen joining the wandle at Colliers Wood by the Merton Board Mills, now I am told defunct. Unfortunately neither of these streams can be traced for any distance as they flow partly below ground and partly behind houses and private property.

ODE TO THE WANDLE.

wandle oh wandle so deep and so wide
washing its banks on either side
Diddicoys camp down by the stream
teas in the garden, strawberries and cream.

wandle oh wandle so fast so strong
carries all before as it flows along
tumbling weirs in King Georges Park
No. 12 tram rattling by in the dark.

wandle oh wandle where watercress grows
how it all started nobody knows
where the crack willows bowed to the brook
where we once heard the call of the rook.

wandle oh wandle where snuff mills stood
our forefathers sniffed it, it done them good
no telly's or radios then to be heard
but the wind in the willows, the song of the bird.

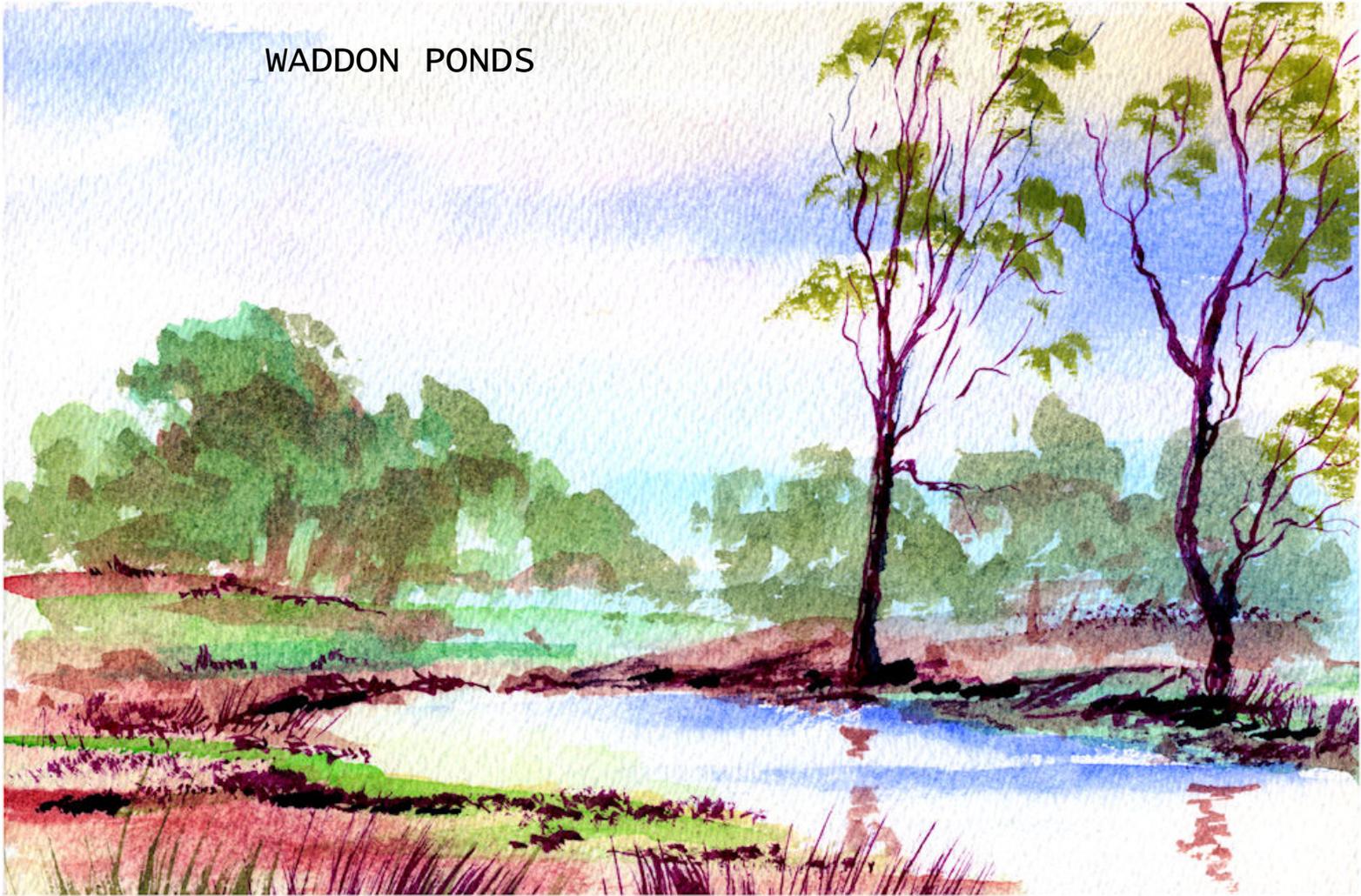
wandle oh wandle sparkling so bright
all the old rubbish thrown in at night
the smell of the tannery as we shuffle past
the mill race it thunders the waters so fast.

wandle oh wandle no fish to be seen
the trout has long gone the polluters have been
soiling the water for many a year
but a clean up has started so shed not a tear.

wandle oh wandle where have you gone
beneath Arndale Centre in conduit long
what of the diddicoys do they still camp
down by Old Mitcham so cold and so damp.

wandle oh wandle sing me your song
'bout the smell of the tannery so very strong
farewell to the garden down by the stream
and to the teas of strawberries and cream.

WADDON PONDS



WADDON PONDS

This public park is within the borough of Croydon and has always reckoned to be the real source of the wandle. The Croydon wandle has always been claimed to be the real River wandle, the other wandle from Carshalton ponds being a tributary. Both rivers are known as the wandle so it seems to matter little. I believe it is, or was, just a local fanaticism.

The only difference I know is that the Carshalton wandle floods every seven years. why this is so is not really known, but when it floods, it creates quite a torrent for a week or two in the area. It is known locally as the Bourne waters. The Croydon wandle is largely in Conduit, and as far as I know does not cause such problems.

BEDDINGTON PARISH CHURCH.



THE CASCADE, CARSHALTON.



THE CASCADE, CARSHALTON

This painting is not quite accurate. When I was there during the 1960's, the whole cascade and surrounding area was covered in bracken and undergrowth and could not be visualised properly from the bridge over the stream, so I mentally cleared away the offending bracken and painted what I considered it should look like.

This particular site was I believe where the Lower Mill was situated the upper Mill being shown in another picture. There is no trace of the mill now. The Cascade is man made and is probably where the original mill race was. It is situated in the Grove, a public open space. There was also at the time I was there some mill stones and a few stone sleepers belonging to the Surrey Iron Railway, although what the sleepers were doing there I do not know, as the railway never reached Carshalton.

UPPER MILL.
THE GROVE.
CARSHALTON.



UPPER MILL. THE GROVE. CARSHALTON.

The wheel is the only remnant left of the upper Mill. The structure around it has been erected in recent times to protect what is left. The whole wheel, although in poor condition, could be seen until some time in the late sixties when the lower half was encased in concrete and completely ruined. The Lower Mill was possibly on the site of the present cascade shown in another picture.

Both mills were flour mills. There are still many buildings along the stretch of the river below this old mill, but are not easily accessible as the river beyond this point seems to be private.

Many of such buildings are old and could well have been mills of some kind or another. There were at one time mills for grinding logwood, (extraction of dyestuffs), snuff mills, peppermint and lavender mills also leather tanneries. There is one tannery still left at colliers wood.



FISHERS COTTAGES, MITCHAM

FISHERS COTTAGES, MITCHAM

The origin of this name is obscure. It could be pertinent to fishing, or maybe Fisher was a onetime owner. Various theories have been put forward. Whatever the answer they are an excellent group of early 19c weather boarded cottages and stand alongside the river just upstream from Mitcham Bridge on the Mitcham-Sutton Road. How they have escaped the attention of vandals I do not know, apart from the fact that they are on private property. They have of course been repaired and partly renovated from time to time and I believe they are now in the hands of the National Trust, in which case they will be well looked after.

RAVENSBURY MILL, MITCHAM.



RAVENSBURY MILL, MITCHAM.

Situated at the western end of Ravensbury Park and on the Morden - Mitcham road, this mill was at one time a flour mill. Although the main mill building seems to have survived, some additions have been made over the years.

I believe it is now a leather and tanning works, and may be connected with Connollys Mill alongside Wandle Bank in Colliers Wood, also a leather and tanning works. This is also an ex mill, and although part of the building, like Ravensbury, survives, it has been much altered and added to.

Some years ago, a Saxon burial mound was unearthed in Ravensbury Park.



MITCHAM STATION.

It has been considered by some railway historians that the station building shown in the drawing was the original structure built by the Surrey Iron Railway for their interchange coal depot at Mitcham. I am inclined to discount this theory on two counts. One that although the building is quite old, it would not appear to be old enough to have been built by the S.I.R., bearing in mind that it would have been constructed in or about 1800, and secondly that it seems to be a much too elaborate building for a coal depot. The S.I.R. carried no passengers at any time during its forty or so years of trading so a station as such would not have been needed.

Mitcham, as far as can be ascertained (see extract from the Railway Magazine), was purely a coal depot and distribution centre where carts called to collect coal for places like Sutton and the surrounding districts.

Nevertheless, it is a rare and unusual building, and does not look like a station at all, maybe it was originally a house built by the railway company for one of their top ranking employees.



SNUFF MILLS. MORDEN HALL PARK.

Fine examples of part weatherboard part brick built mills dating from the early 19c. Both were reasonably intact until the mid nineteen seventies when the authorities decided to remove one of the mill wheels as the flow of the river was being impeded. This act of course ruined the look of the twin mills, they look odd with only one mill wheel. My drawing shows the two. I did this before the damage was done.

The mills are situated close by Morden Hall in the park of that name. I have seen this park completely flooded in times of heavy rain, so maybe the flow was impeded after all. The park, Morden Hall, and the mill buildings are owned by the National Trust.

In the hey-day of these mills, snuff taking was at its height, what the output of these mills were I do not know, but the taking of snuff must have been enormously popular, as there were other snuff mills along the river as well as these twins.

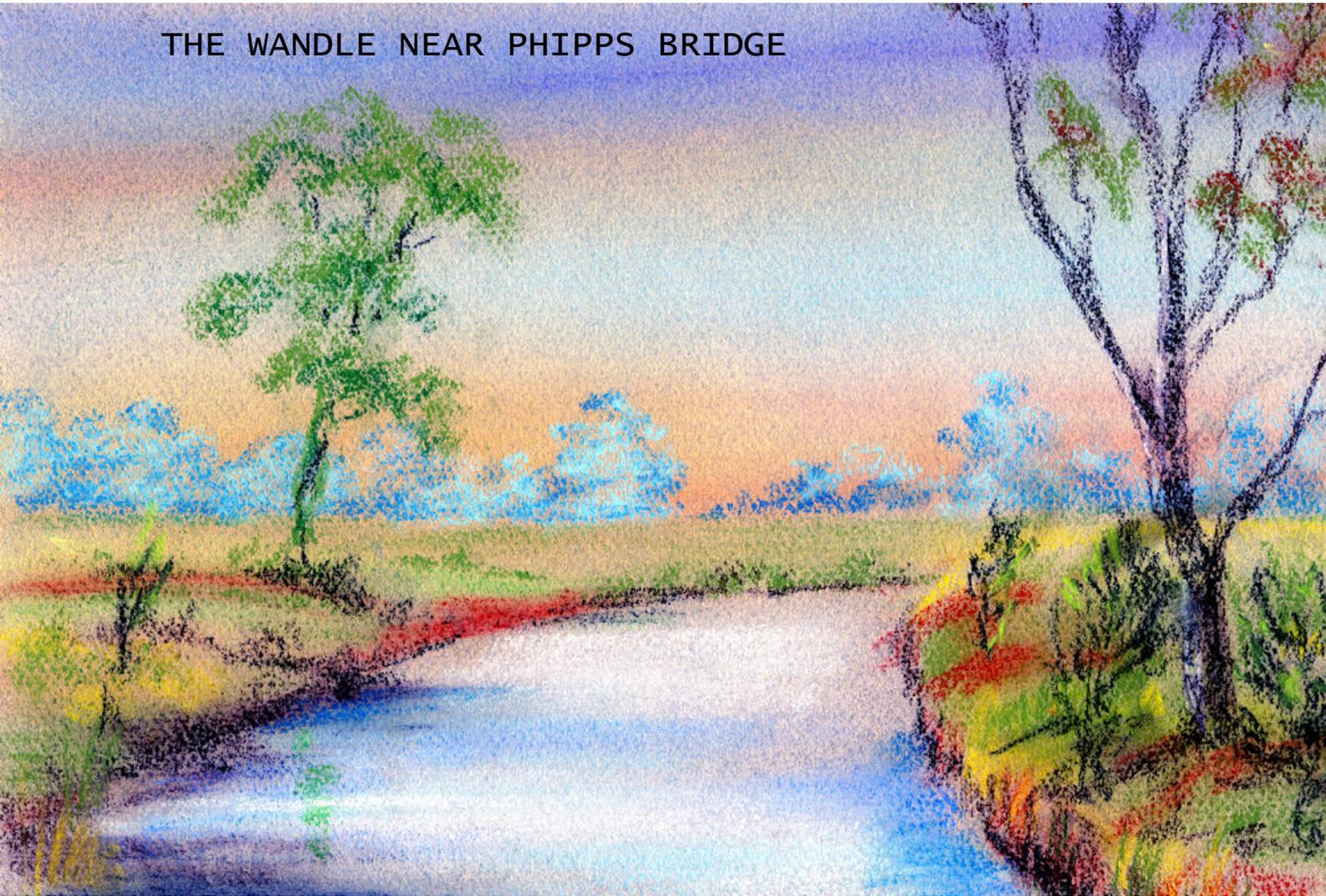
Twin Snuff Mills, Morden Hall Park





THE WANDLE IN FLOOD,
MORDEN HALL PARK

THE WANDLE NEAR PHIPPS BRIDGE



THE WANDLE NEAR PHIPPS BRIDGE

This was what the river looked like during the mid 1970's around the area known as Phipps Bridge meadows, or the Old Deer Park, situated toward the Merton end of Morden Hall Park.

It was a very rural area at the time, whether it still is I know not, although it is not likely that Morden Hall Park will be built over. The Wimbledon-Sutton, via Mitcham railway line runs across this area beyond the trees. The whole area is liable to flood in times of excessive rain. I have seen this area when it has been impenetrable.



MERTON PRIORY RUINS.

Use this drawing in conjunction with the Merton Priory plan.

The pits are graves in which skeletal remains were found. These graves, some of which are brick lined, would seem to be within the boundaries of the Chapter House and the South Transept, in which case the long gone occupants must have been persons of some importance, as ordinary brethren were normally buried either within the cloisters or in consecrated ground outside the buildings but within the precincts of the priory grounds.

In the upper left hand corner is shown the remains of the "up" platform of the long defunct Merton Abbey Station. Why the railway company named their station Merton Abbey and not Merton Priory, which apparently is the correct definition, I cannot say. There is also an Abbey Road nearby.

By the time this drawing was done in 1979, the ruins had been uncovered for some time, and therefore became once again, partly overgrown, but the outline of this particular part of the building was easily traceable.

There was some talk about this time of keeping the uncovered parts of the priory as an archaeological site, but whether this happened or whether the site has since been built over, I do not know.



PRIORY GATE FROM
MERTON PRIORY

1983

NORMAN ARCHWAY BELONGING TO MERTON PRIORY. Early 12c.

Originally a part of the priory, this Norman archway was discovered in or about 1914. It had, for many years, been incorporated in part of Liberty's silk mill and printing works, which in turn had been part of the William Morris workshops.

The arch was removed piecemeal in the 1920's, re-erected and repaired in the grounds of Merton Parish church, where it stands today. Although much altered, it remains an excellent piece of Norman architecture, and with any luck, being in use as an entrance gate to the vicarage, may be spared the attention of the local yobbos.

NEXT PAGE...

PRIORY GATEWAY IN STATION ROAD.

This little gateway and the walling is part of the perimeter wall of Merton Priory, it has been reported that this gateway led into the section where the guest house stood, although as far as I know no evidence of this has so far been found. The "dig" referred to in the plan drawing did not extend to this area.

Built basically of rubble, probably Kentish rag stone, the wall has fallen into disrepair in recent times, but the local council has at least endeavoured to protect the archway by supporting it with brickwork and adding drip-stones and other embellishments.

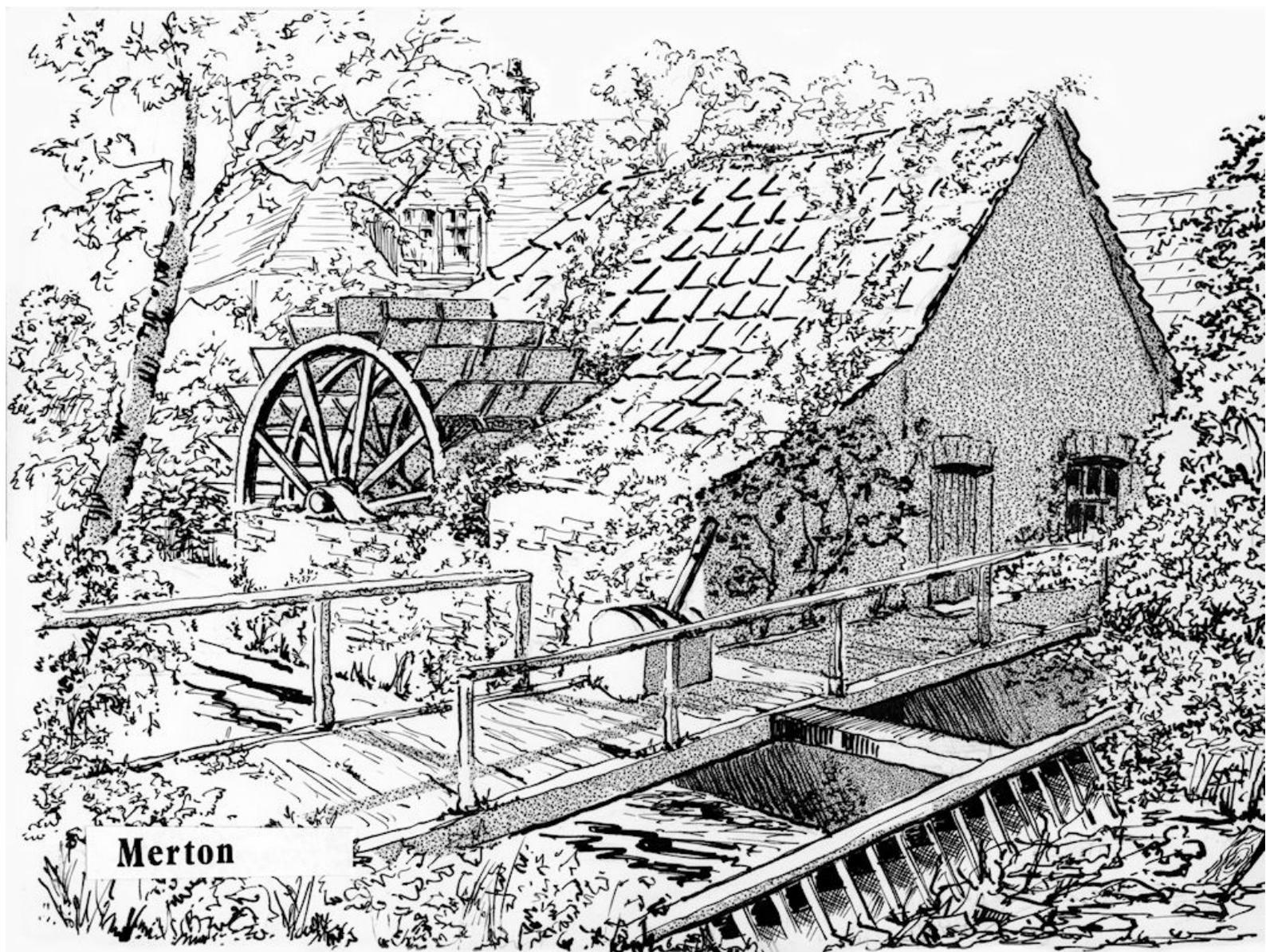
The approximate position is shown on the plan, but the actual route of the wall cannot be shown as it is uncertain and does not seem to tie up in any way with the course of the river, although this may have at some time in the past been diverted. The River Wandle has been interfered with and canalised and re-routed one way and another throughout its history. The true course in some places will never be determined.

The gateway was still in situ in 1979, but at that time was suffering badly at the hands of vandals.



Snow Gateway
Station Road.

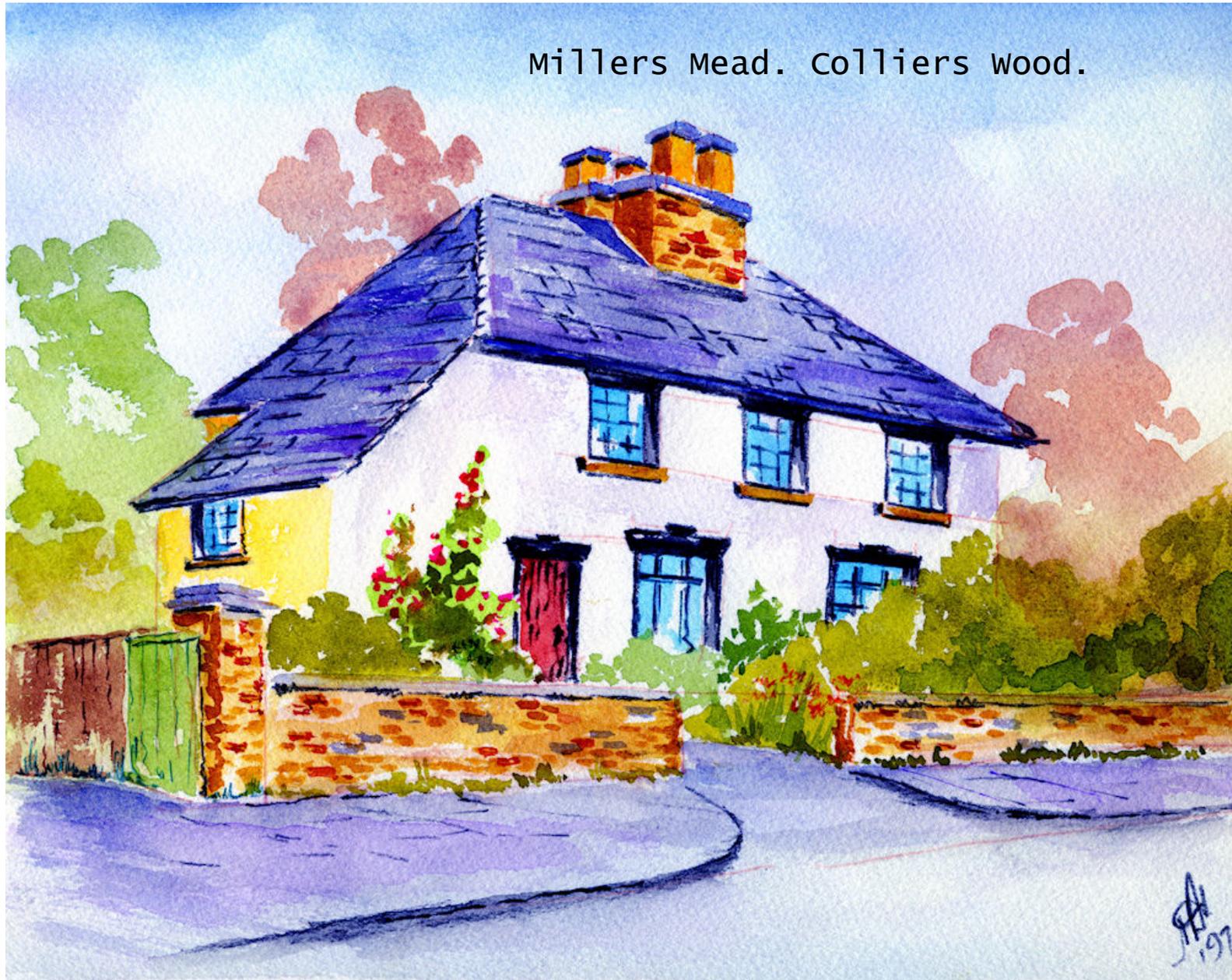
AA
1964



Merton

LIBERTY'S MILL, MERTON ABBEY

Millers Mead. Colliers Wood.



This is how Millers Mead looked before being gutted and all but destroyed by vandals in the late 1970's. The house dates from late 18th c. It was occupied at one time by a miller whose mill was probably somewhere behind the house in what is now Wandle Park.

The house was also used as the local posting house and South London headquarters of the Bow Street Runners. The runners were an early detective force who were instructed from Bow Street to locate and bring in felons on the run. The stabling block for their horses was at the rear of the house, demolished a while back.

The Bow Street Runners were disbanded in 1829. A plaque on the building records the fact. The house now has a preservation order placed on it, so it should be safe.

I believe since doing this painting, the property has been renovated.

OLD COPPER MILL, WIMBLEDON
(From Plough Lane Bridge, 1964)





THE LEATHER BOTTLE. EARLSFIELD.

This is a very old public house, or at least the site has been occupied by public premises for a vary long time. It is in the Garratt Lane not far from Earlsfield station, and has the reputation of being one of the stops made by the drivers of the Surrey Iron Railway in the early 19c. This could well be so, as no doubt they would have needed some form of refreshment at points along the route.

In later years it was the southern terminus of the No.67 bus route, now defunct, and the buses used to stand in the forecourt shown in the drawing, before returning to their northern terminus at Stoke Newington in North London.



FLOUR MILL ON THE WANDLE AT WANDSWORTH

FLOUR MILL ON THE WANDLE AT WANDSWORTH

Pimm's Mill, Wandsworth, the last flour mill to remain in the Wandsworth area and a splendid example of an early 19c weather boarded mill. Demolished by the council in 1966, another act of official vandalism. The undershot wheel was somewhere below the floor of the building, possibly in the archway as the sluice is situated to one side.

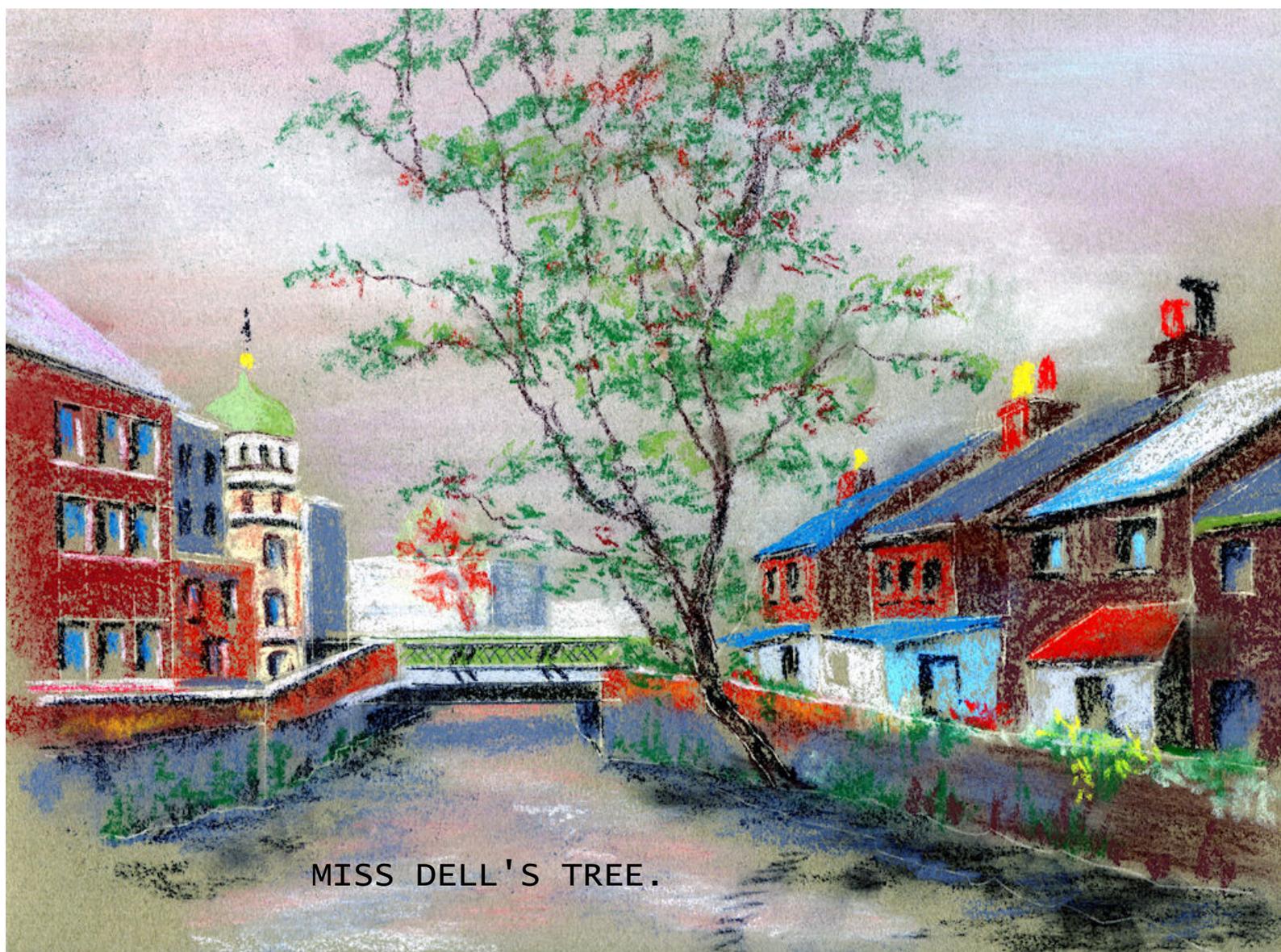
This mill should have been preserved as it was the sole survivor of its type along the whole of the wandle. There were originally three main flour mills in this area, known respectively as the Upper, Middle and Lower flour mills. Mr. Pimm's was I believe the Upper mill, the middle being about by the High Street Bridge, see drawing, and the lower somewhere down by The Plain. There is now no trace of any of them.



THE AQUEDUCT. WANDSWORTH.

This structure crossed the wandle valley from St. Anne Hill on the east side to Merton Road on the west. It was built as a high level sewer about 1878, but was never a very successful enterprise. Some of the arches began to sag and lean not long after it was built, probably due to the marshy ground thereabouts and insufficiently strong footings to withstand the thrust. Whatever the reason the whole structure needed buttressing, and even then the lean was very evident in some places. Nevertheless it seemed to serve its purpose for many years, but by the early 1960's it was declared unsafe and was consequently pulled down in 1967, the sewer being diverted underground.

It was quite a long aqueduct with many arches, possibly about 1000 yards long. It crossed two main roads, Garrett Lane. that is the girdered section shown in my drawing, and Buckhold Road, which took the form of an elongated arch.



MISS DELL'S TREE.

This tree, I think it was an ash, is shown as it actually was in the 1960's, seemingly growing out of the river bank. It was once in the garden of Miss Dell's Academy for Young Ladies, (for refined young ladies of course). That was during the last century.

The cottages on the right were built about 1860-70 and were known as Stimson's Buildings. Behind the cottages was an alleyway where a stall market was held every week. The bridge is the high street or Town bridge, and the buildings on the left bank were the Council public baths. There is nothing left of this area, the whole lot being swept away during the 1960s to make way for the Arndale Shopping Centre. The river itself was directed into conduit and is now beneath the Centre and out of sight.

It does emerge however beyond the bridge by the old Ram brewery.



THE OLD IRON BRIDGE.

I do not know when this footbridge was erected or who supplied it, probably the Carron Iron Company during the latter part of the 19c.

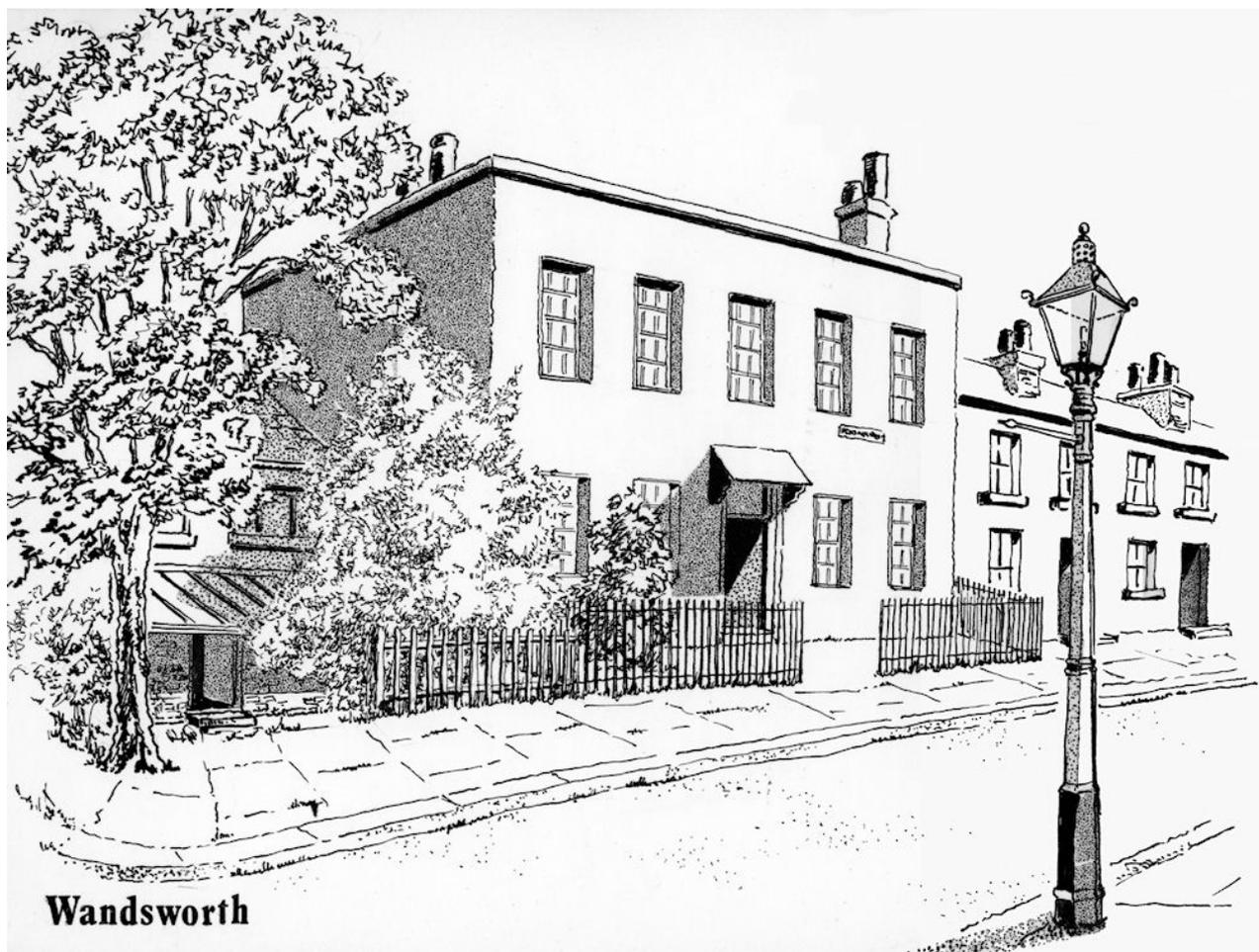
It connected Garratt Lane with "The Fields", later converted into King George's Park. The footplates had long since lost their "treads" and in inclement weather were very slippery and dangerous. A good many arms and legs were broken in icy weather.

The building on the right on this side of the bridge has always been, at least to my knowledge, an engineering works of some kind. During the First world war it was used as an assembly plant for such machines as the Sopwith Pup, Handley Page O/400 bomber, the bombs during the early stages being just lobbed over the side, the bomb aimer hoping for the best. Refinements came later. There was also I believe such machines as the Vickers Vimy, the Dehavilland 4's and 9's. Possibly others as well. These machines were used extensively by the then Royal Flying Corp during the early part of the war. It must have been a very busy place at that time.

The building on the right over the bridge (it can just be seen) was, I believe used for various purposes. At one time it was known as the Rabbit Skin factory. Lorry loads of rabbit skins were delivered daily and the place stank to high heaven. I would imagine they made glue from the hides judging by the stench.

The footpath over the "fields" was considered unsafe at night owing to certain undesirables frequenting the place. I have walked that footpath at all times of the day and night, and the only undesirables I have come across were the odd tramp now and again who were harmless and courting couples hiding in the shadows. The footpath was gas lit and in high winds sometimes the gas lamps blew out. When this happened the place was even more eerie. Shadows everywhere, and dark corners. It was always a challenge to walk "The Fields" at night.

The couple in the picture appear to be walking at the same level as the bridge handrail. This is due to the fact that where they are walking (Garrett Lane) is at a higher level than the footway of the bridge. There is a slope from the end of the bridge furthest from the viewer, indicated by the railing on the left.



THE BOLTING CLOTH MILL c 1914.

This mill stood in a little street called Frogmore, off the Putney Bridge Road. Bolting cloth was woven from pure silk, and was known and used in the flour milling industry for many years. Weaving bolting cloth called for a high degree of skill, the warp and the weft had to be a true 90 degrees with no unnecessary knotting or distortion, and the gauge also had to be exact, i.e. mesh to the inch. The cloth was used for sieving flour through its various grades from coarse to fine depending on the mesh of the silk.

In later years bolting cloth found a use in the screen printing industry, hence silk screen printing. These days, I believe, owing to its cost, silk has been replaced by manmade fibre bolting cloth. In screen printing however, silk, albeit expensive, has been found to withstand all the various paints inks and dyes etc that are used in this trade, whereas some artificial fibres broke down when used in conjunction with some printing mediums, particularly those composed of a cellulosic base.

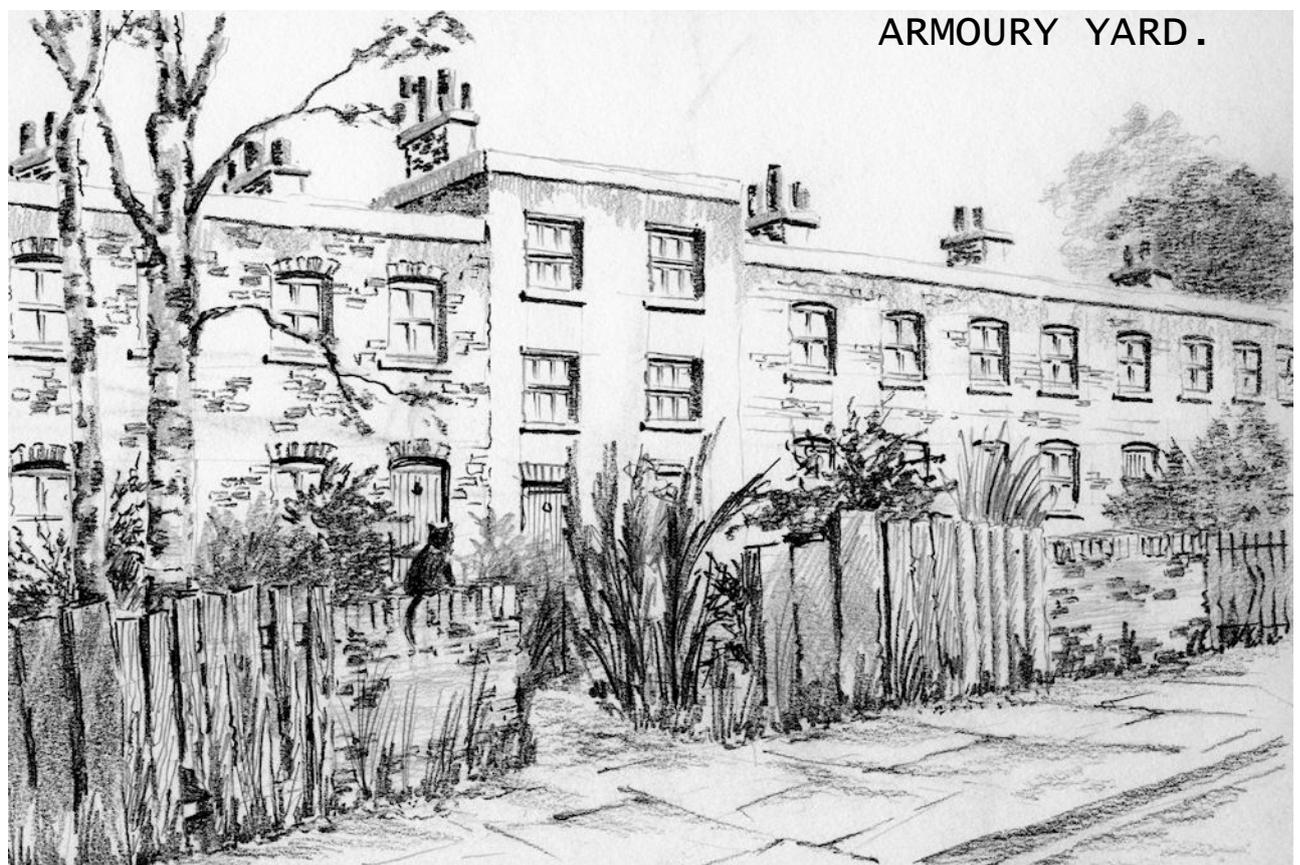
The street lamp shown in the drawing is a fairly early type of incandescent light used and maintained by the local councils in the streets and public places. It burned town gas (i.e. from coal) and this type of lamp needed the services of a lamplighter twice daily, at dusk to light it and at dawn to extinguish.

The system was that the lamplighter carried a pole some 7 - 8 foot long on one end of which was a spigot which made contact with a corresponding lever just below the lantern, and also on the same end

was a small paraffin wadding lamp enclosed in a brass case drilled with vent holes. The action of the lever turned on the gas, at the same time the wadding lamp made contact with the gas mantle thereby igniting the gas.

The lamplighter came round again at dawn to turn off the supply. The extension seen at the top of the column is a ladder rest to enable the men to service and repair the fittings. The gas in this instance (for this area), was supplied by the Wandsworth and District Gas Light and Coke Company, the fittings by a company by the name of Sugg, and the cast iron column by the Carron Iron Works.

The Gas Company disappeared with the arrival of North Sea Gas. The Sugg company I do not know about, and the Carron company I believe now manufacture gas stoves and the like. The gas mantles were made either by Veritas or Welsbach. Both these companies had Wandsworth works. Both these factories were still in situ during the mid nineteen seventies, but not for the manufacture of gas mantles.

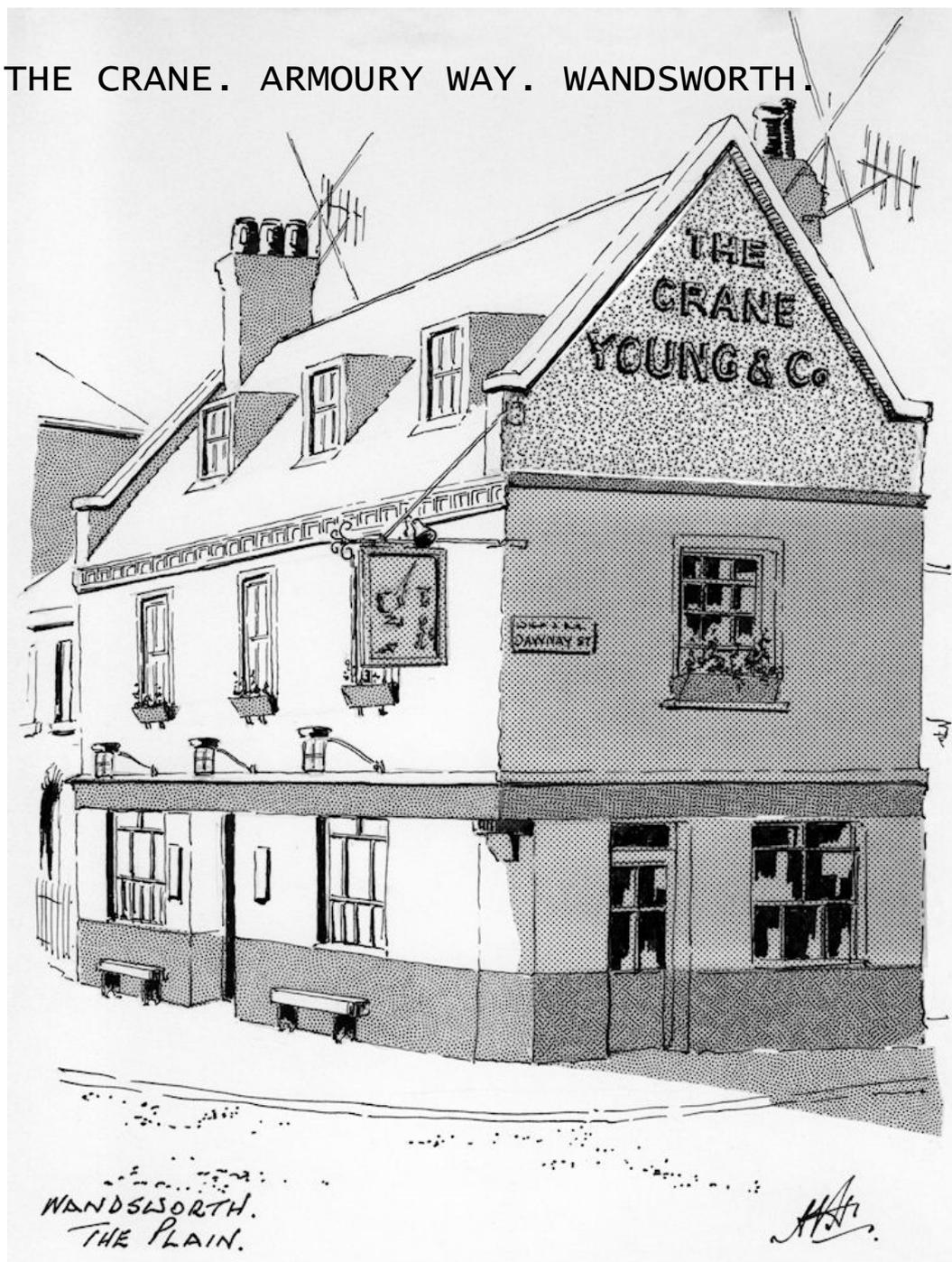


ARMOURY YARD.

A row of cottages (demolished in the 1950s) situated just behind The Reain. These were of interest firstly because their gardeners in summertime were a mass of colour and secondly the whole of Armory Yard was owned by a member of the family before the 2nd World War. This person also owned another group of cottages off the Putney Bridge Road known as Lilac Cottages.

Armory is so called after an armoury which was situated about the area during the Napoleonic wars. When the armoury itself was demolished I do not know, possibly about the time the cottages were built, maybe around the mid 19c.

THE CRANE. ARMOURY WAY. WANDSWORTH.



THE CRANE. ARMOURY WAY. WANDSWORTH.

Named after the mechanical crane - not the bird. Like the Leather Bottle, this house is said to be another call for the drivers and staff of the Surrey Iron Railway. The name "Crane" indicates some connection, and the inference could well be true as it is the last public house on the River, and is about half a mile above the outfall at Wandsworth Creek, where the basin and terminus of the S.I.R. used to be.

Armoury takes its name from an actual armoury which was established hereabouts at the time of Waterloo. It was manned and maintained by the local militia. No trace remains of the armoury or the site. (See also Armoury Yard.)

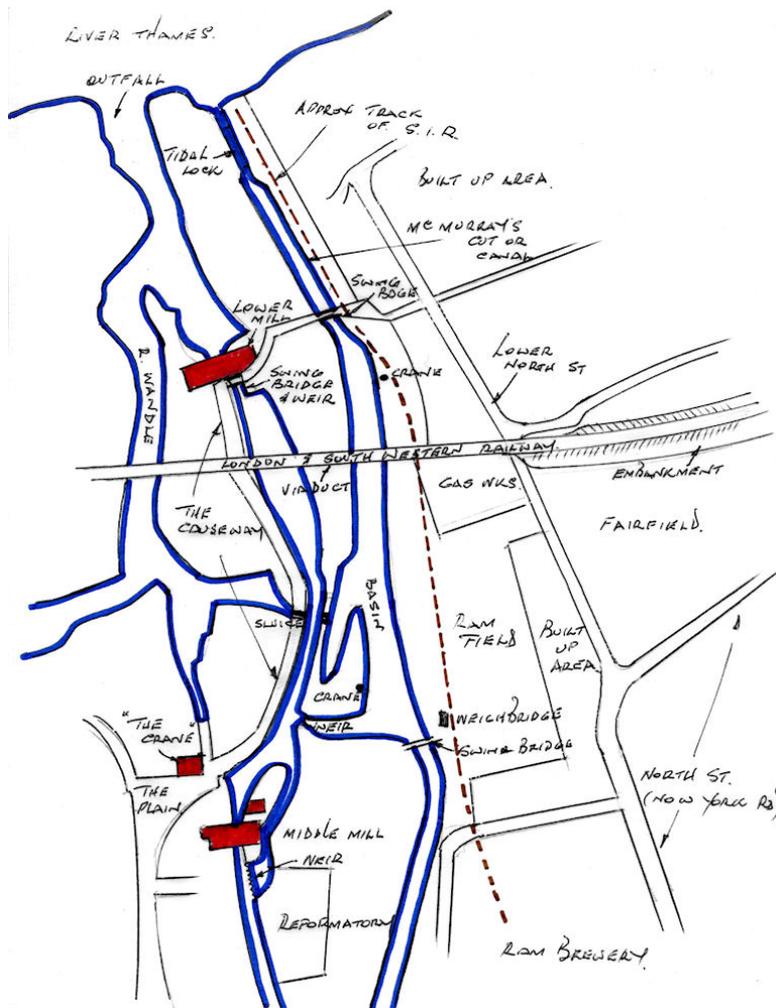
HUGENOT BURIAL GROUND



This quaint little cemetery is situated just behind the old Council House at the junction of East Hill and Battersea Rise. It has very close connections with the wandle valley and I considered it worth including in the collection of drawings.

The Huguenots had been persecuted in France for very many years, and in 1666 Louis XIV issued an Edict weakening their position still further. By 1685 this edict had been revoked but their position was still in jeopardy and many of them migrated to America and Britain to avoid further persecution. Some of these people settled in the Wandsworth district along by the wandle and established themselves in their various trades, which comprised among others, weaving, vat dyeing, those engaged in this trade were known as scarlet dyers from the fact that they used the dyestuff extracted from the logwood which was ground in the logwood mills about the area, brass and copper working, (hence frying pan houses) down by Frogmore, felt makers, hat makers etc. All these industries had died out by the end of the 19c, but the names of many of these people lived on through their descendants. I knew several families with very obvious French names in the 1920's. The Huguenots bought the burial ground very early on possibly in the 17c. It has not been used for many years now. About 12 to 15 years ago controversy raged over this cemetery as the powers that be wanted to drive a motor road right through it. The protesters had their way and the road was diverted.

LAYOUT OF THE WANDLE OUTFALL.



This map, taken from another d/d 1866 shows the general layout of the outfall of the River Wandle as it appeared at that time.

The Surrey Iron Railway had been sold by that time and possibly taken up as it is not shown on the map, but both Upper and Lower Mills are shown, so they must have been operating at that time.

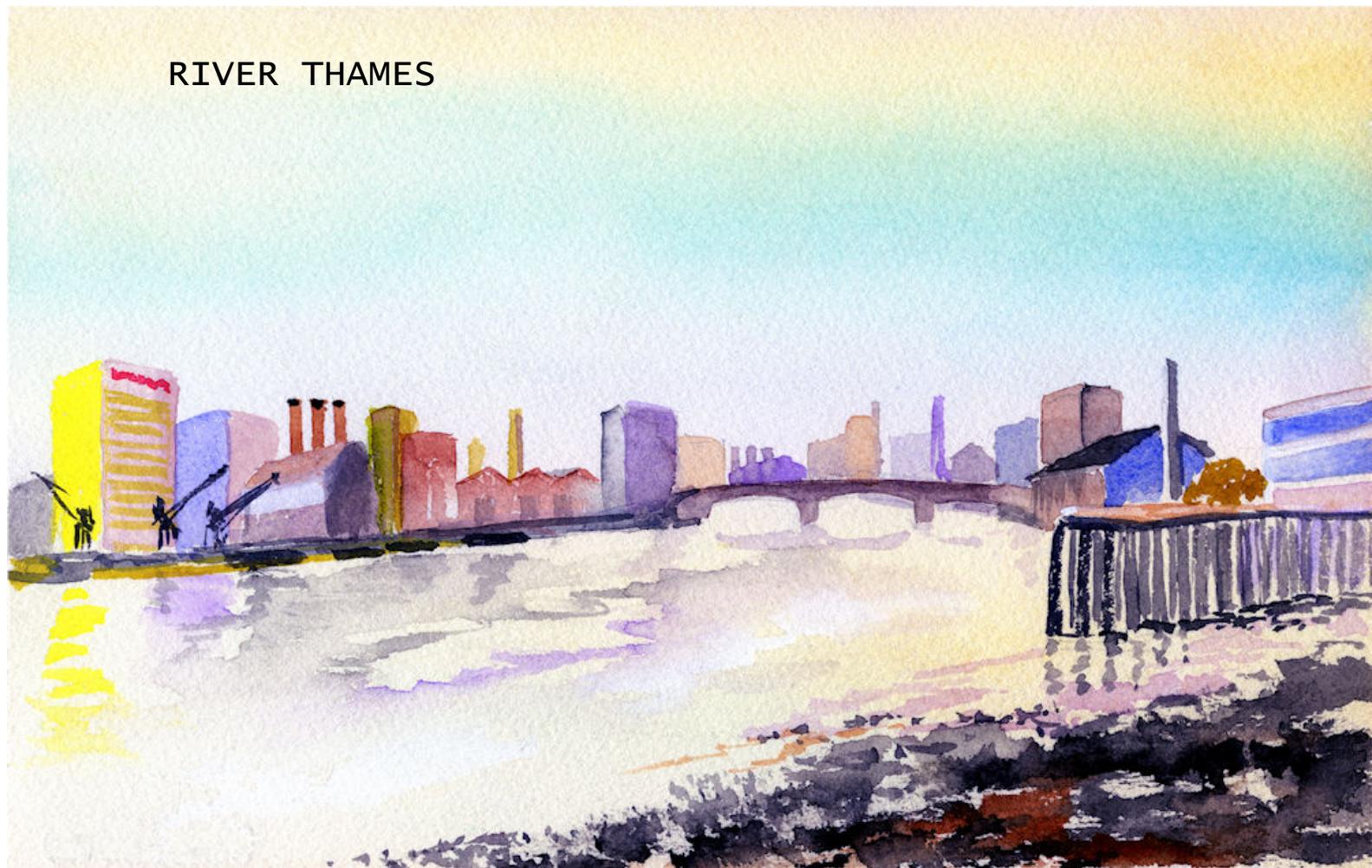
The Third or upper Mill (Pimm's, shown in my drawing), probably was also, although there must have been considerable changes going on even at that time.

Apart from a new road and a few demolitions the general arrangement was still recognisable 100 years later in 1966 when I visited the area.

The mills had long gone of course and some of the smaller streets had disappeared, particularly round the Plain area.

The gas works extended its premises considerably over the years, but even that now has disappeared. I was able to follow The Causeway to the end found the site of the Lower Mill. It is now occupied, like many other parts of the area by private property and factories and cannot be visited by the public. The outfall itself is inaccessible and I was unable to locate the site of the Middle Mill. The only buildings that are still around, although probably subjected to much alteration, seem to be the Ham Brewery and The Crane public house. My drawing of the Crane was taken from the later Armoury May which cuts across from the Putney Bridge Road near the junction with the high street to York Road and in so doing probably completely obliterated the site of Middle Mill. The river drops considerably from the High Street to the Thames. There are several weirs and a drop of some twenty feet or so by way of a flume situated where the old swing bridge is marked by the Lower Mill. The amount of water and the power it creates is tremendous at this point which seems to be surprising for such a small river.

RIVER THAMES



RIVER THAMES BY WANDSWORTH CREEK.

This picture was taken from Wandsworth Park, the nearest point of public access to the outfall of the Wandle where it discharges into the river.

The outfall is not within sight. It is just beyond and to the right of the piles on the right hand side of the picture. In the background is Wandsworth Bridge, and the borough of Fulham over on the opposite bank.

THE SURREY IRON RAILWAY.

This early railway has much in common with the Wandle valley, as the line ran from the long filled in basin at Wandsworth Creek, which was situated where the now defunct Gas works used to be, to Pitlake Meadow at Croydon, also ex-gas works property, near to Wandle Park.

It more or less followed the river all the way, basically for two reasons, one that the ground along the valley floor was flat, and devoid of all but a few minor gradients, and secondly, the railway was intended to serve the mills along the route. It was opened for public goods traffic in 1801, was horse drawn throughout, no steam ever being used, and carried mainly fullers earth and lime in one direction, and coal in the other, coal being off loaded from the Thames barges, which in turn brought it from the colliers which sailed regularly from Newcastle.

The line was never really a financial success, as the Croydon Canal was opened a few years later and took away much of the trade that the railway had obtained. The canal ran from Rotherhithe to Croydon. Neither route was faster than the other, both being horse drawn, but it was said that coal from the colliers could be off loaded straight into the canal barges without the use of lighters which were necessary in the case of the railway. Thus saving time. Both the canal and the railway worked in opposition to each other for a number of years, but neither was very satisfactory and both lost money.

They both sold out in the end after about 40 years of working. The railway at first ran from Wandsworth Creek to Pitlake Meadow, with two branch lines, one from Pitlake to Croydon Canal basin, (now occupied by West Croydon Station), and the other from Willow Lane, near Mitcham Station to the leather mills at Hackbridge.

Of the leather mills there is no trace.

It was later intended to extend the line to Godstone, but in fact it was only carried through to Merstham Lime Quarries - again no trace, (lost under the recently built M.23). The section of the line from Pitlake to Merstham was known as the Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway, and was originally an independent company.

Although this part of the line has no real connection with the Valley as such, there being no river beyond Pitlake, mention has been made as a matter of interest and it is also shown on the Surrey Iron Railway map.

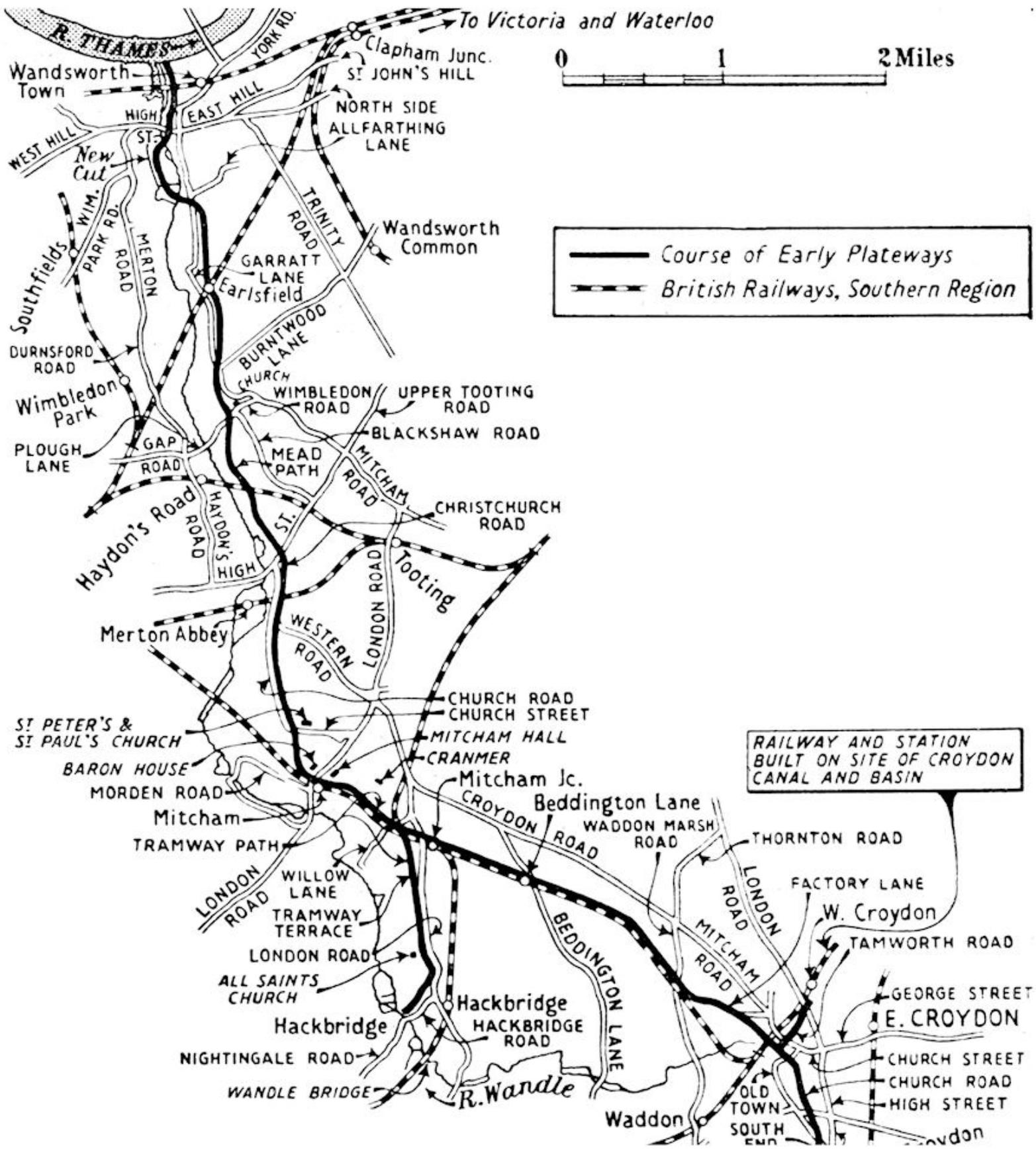
Not very much remains of the S.I.R., although the actual route can be traced in places. Travelling north, the track from Pitlake followed the present railway line from there, alongside Factory Lane, by Waddon Marsh and across Mitcham Common - crossing Beddington Lane - to the present Mitcham Station. The Hackbridge branch came in about this point from its terminus, about where the river bridge now carries the Hackbridge Road, then alongside the London Road to join the main line by Willow Bridge. Some of the Hackbridge branch can be traced alongside the London Road below the Goat Inn. It is recognisable as a low embankment, at one time considerably higher. Stand on Willow Bridge and look to the left. The curve of the track as it leaves the main line toward Hackbridge is recognisable as an overgrown pathway running behind the back gardens of houses.

I would mention that I researched the S.I.R. in the 1960's and early 70's, so it is possible that some of the sections I mention here could have been destroyed or built over, although I would consider that much of it is still extant.

From Mitcham the line turned north, and followed the present Church Road and Christchurch Road to a point on the Colliers Wood High Street known as Singlegate - this was a single (nets double) toll gate - about opposite the present Colliers Wood underground station. The name Singlegate still survives in the school by that name nearby. As far as I know, Colliers Wood has never had any connection with coal or colliers, the name I believe, belonging to a person of property who once lived around there.

From this point the track followed Byegrove and Mead roads, and can be again traced by following Mead Path as far as Plough Lane. Cross Plough Lane and follow Summerstown and Garrett Lane as far as Earlsfield Station. Just beyond this point Garratt Lane makes a dog-leg turn, whereas the track of the railway kept straight on, emerging on the wandsworth side of the dog-leg through what was once a row of cottages, believed to have been railway cottages, still there at the time of writing, but possibly demolished by now. Hereon there is no trace of the line, hut the route more or less followed Garrett Lane as far as wandsworth, crossing the wandle in two places about where the Arndale Centre now stands.

My drawings pertinent to the S.I.R., are purely visuals. I have no definite evidence of what it looked like.

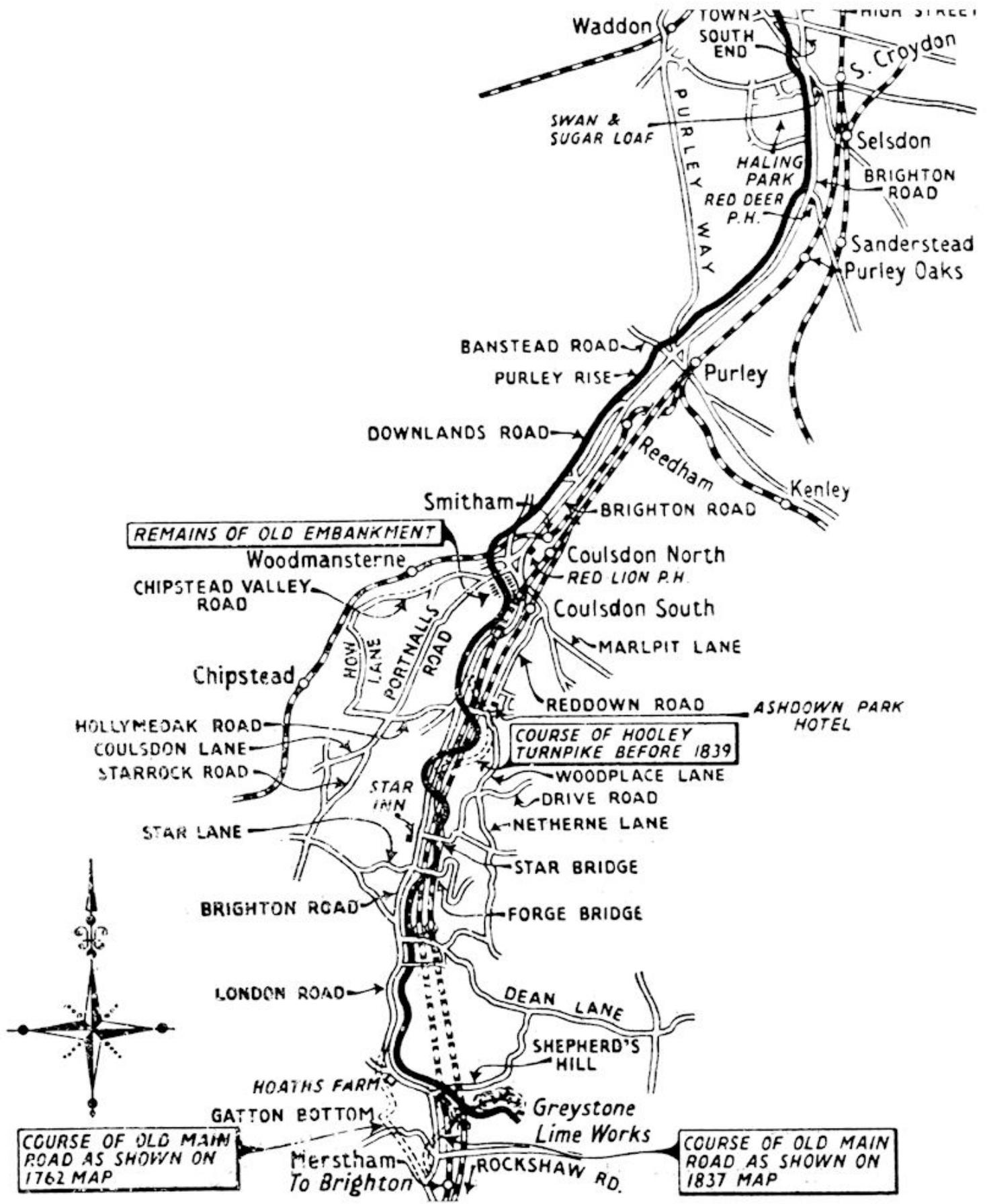


0 1 2 Miles

— Course of Early Plateways
 - - - British Railways, Southern Region

RAILWAY AND STATION
 BUILT ON SITE OF CROYDON
 CANAL AND BASIN

R. THAMES
 Wandsworth Town
 WEST HILL
 New Cut
 WIM. PARK RD.
 SOUTHFIELDS
 DURNSFORD ROAD
 WIMBLEDON PARK
 PLOUGH LANE
 GAP ROAD
 Haydon's Road
 Merton Abbey
 ST. PETER'S & ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
 BARON HOUSE
 MORDEN ROAD
 Mitcham
 TRAMWAY PATH
 LONDON ROAD
 WILLOW LANE
 TRAMWAY TERRACE
 LONDON ROAD
 ALL SAINTS CHURCH
 Hackbridge
 NIGHTINGALE ROAD
 WANDLE BRIDGE
 R. Wandle
 Waddon
 OLD TOWN SOUTH END
 W. CROYDON
 E. CROYDON
 GEORGE STREET
 CHURCH STREET
 CHURCH ROAD
 HIGH STREET
 Clapham Junc.
 ST. JOHN'S HILL
 NORTH SIDE ALLFARTHING LANE
 Wandsworth Common
 EAST HILL
 YORK RD.
 To Victoria and Waterloo
 TRINITY ROAD
 GARRATT LANE
 Earlsfield
 BURNTWOOD LANE
 CHURCH
 WIMBLEDON ROAD
 UPPER TOOTING ROAD
 BLACKSHAW ROAD
 MITCHAM ROAD
 CHRISTCHURCH ROAD
 Tooting
 LONDON ROAD
 WESTERN ROAD
 CHURCH ROAD
 CHURCH STREET
 MITCHAM HALL
 CRANMER
 Mitcham Jc.
 Beddington Lane
 WADDON MARSH ROAD
 THORNTON ROAD
 LONDON ROAD
 FACTORY LANE
 W. Croydon
 TAMWORTH ROAD
 MITCHAM ROAD
 BEDDINGTON LANE
 HACKBRIDGE ROAD
 HACKBRIDGE
 HACKBRIDGE ROAD
 WADDON



Article from The Railway Magazine, February, 1950

The World's First Public Railway

Probably no other railway of the pre-steam traction era has been mentioned so extensively in both contemporary and modern writings as the Surrey Iron Railway. This is not surprising, as it was both the world's first public railway, and also the first of any kind in the neighbourhood of the Metropolis.

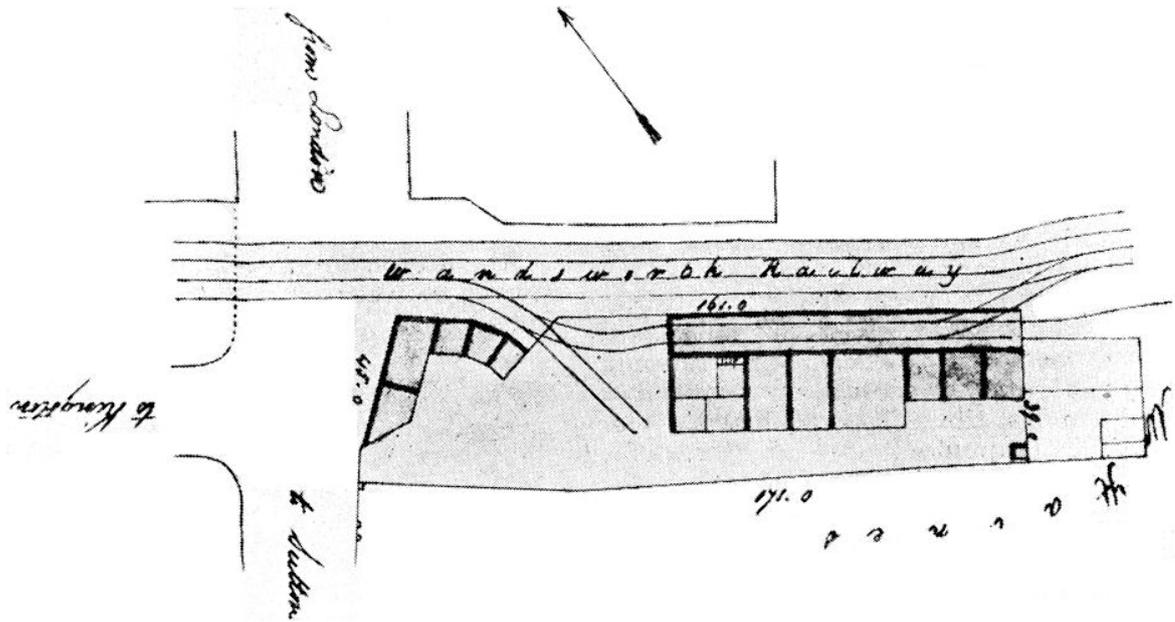
What are less easy to understand are the wide variations in the published statements, and the apparent conflict of evidence concerning important points in its history. It has been the endeavour of Mr. Charles E. Lee, for many years, to resolve the doubtful points and prepare a consistent story, and the results of his researches have been published from time to time in The Railway Magazine during the past twenty years.

This material, was collated, and presented to The Newcomen Society by him in a Paper on December 11, 1940, and it was issued subsequently from this office in booklet form under the title "Early Railways in Surrey" price 2s. 6d.; very few copies remain available. The extensive rearrangement necessitated by war damage, of records at Waterloo that had been preserved by the Southern Railway and its predecessors, revealed various early title deeds and land plans, as well as references in early minute books, of which the existence had not been known previously, partly by reason of obscure indexing.

Fortunately, some of this rearrangement was conducted by Mr. C. E. C. Townsend, B.Sc., then with the Chief Civil Engineer's Department, Southern Railway, who appreciated the historical value of the documents in question. With the consent of the Secretary of the Southern Railway Company, and subsequently of the Chief Regional Officer, this new material was offered to The Newcomen Society on January 11, by Mr. Townsend in the form of a supplementary Paper. A point to which he gave particular attention was the route, and the general sketch map from his Paper is reproduced.

One of the many interesting points that has come to light is that the branch from Pitlake to the Croydon Canal Basin (which was on the site of the present West Croydon Station) was actually built by the Croydon Canal Company, apparently under parliamentary powers for the construction of a public road from North End to the end of Church Street, Croydon.

The deeds show no reference to the road having been made in the time of the Canal Company, although a railway branch was laid along the course. The canal and branch railway were closed on August 22, 1836, and the route of the branch was used in 1845 as the site of the present Tamworth Road. Much information has become available concerning the closing years of the life of the Croydon, Merstham & Godstone Iron Railway, and it appears that a section of this was used by a contractor to convey his materials for the construction of the London & Brighton Railway, after public traffic had ceased. Our second illustration is a facsimile of a plan from a lease of 1843, showing track connections on the site of the present Mitcham Station.



Facsimile of plan from a lease of 1843 of a coal merchant's depot on the site of the present Mitcham Station, served by a siding from the Surrey Iron Railway. This is the only known plan showing track connections on the S.I.R. (See accompanying paragraph).

'In search of the Surrey Iron Railway'

Since this is a linear walk it will be necessary to use public transport both to return to the start (if a car park is needed) and for linking up the walking sections. Brief details of bus and rail services are given in the text. Wandsworth High Street (start) can be reached via Clapham Junction and a return made from West Croydon Station to Victoria or London Bridge. There are numerous refreshment houses en route.

The first public railway in the world belonged to Surrey. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, long before the age of steam, a bill was passed in Parliament authorising the building of a railway between Wandsworth Creek and Croydon. The first meeting of shareholders took place at the Spread Eagle Hotel, Wandsworth High Street on June 4th 1801. Four years later an extension to Merstham was approved. The earlier plan had been to carry a line from London to Portsmouth but our success at Trafalgar removed the threat to Channel shipping and this was no longer an urgent issue.

The Surrey Iron Railway was not a passenger line but carried coal, timber, lime and stone from the Merstham quarries. The stone was used in the construction of many London buildings including London Bridge. The first part of our survey of the S.I.R. is more of a journey into industrial archaeology than a search for the rural scene. This area of London has become under-privileged in recent years. Half a century ago there were still intriguing paths, old world cottages and quaint corners to explore. Today they have been swamped under a plethora of so-called development and the factory horizon stretches everywhere. Nevertheless, it makes an interesting exercise and a fitting preliminary to the less urban part of our travels (Part Two - featured in the next issue of Surrey Life).

ROUTE: Before starting out on the main route a short detour can be made along York Road to the site of the old terminal basin near the Thames. Returning beside the Ram Brewery, note a square sleeper embedded in the yellow brickwork of the wall. There was once another at Summerstown but this has long since disappeared. The walk begins at the Spread Eagle Inn in Wandsworth High Street.

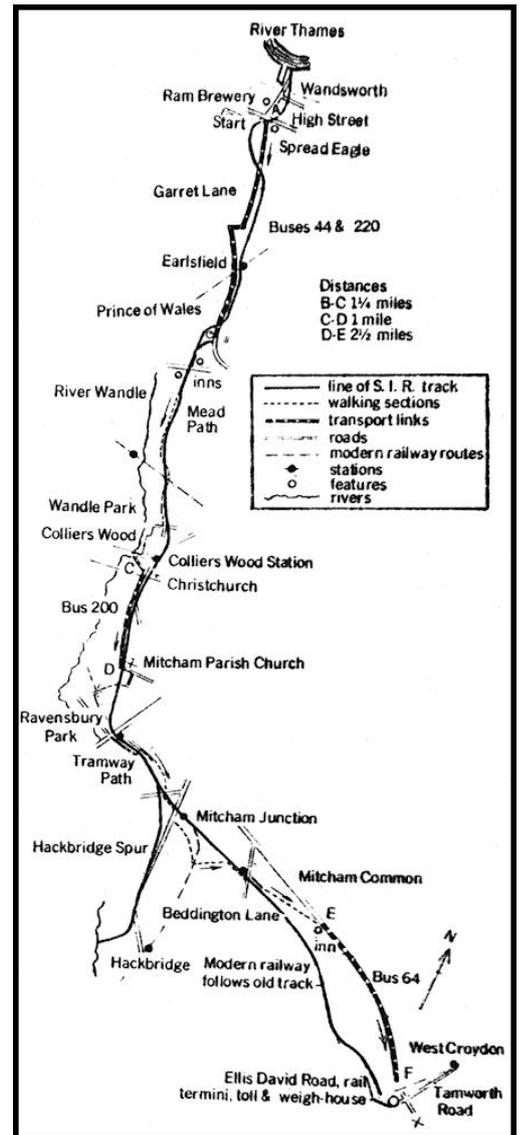
Go down Garratt Lane for a short distance to the first bus stop on the left and take no. 44 or 220 to Summerstown. Alight at the Prince of Wales, cross over to the water trough (an interesting relic of the days of horse drawn traffic - 1889) and follow the Summerstown Road, round a bend and forward, to Plough Lane at the end. Opposite is Mead Path (the exact line of the old route) which can be followed for nearly a mile, first beside the Garden of Remembrance of Lambeth Cemetery, then under the railway and between fences beneath a long line of pollarded trees to emerge on Dennison Road, Colliers Wood. Here turn right for fifty yards to a green gate on left giving access into Wandle Park.

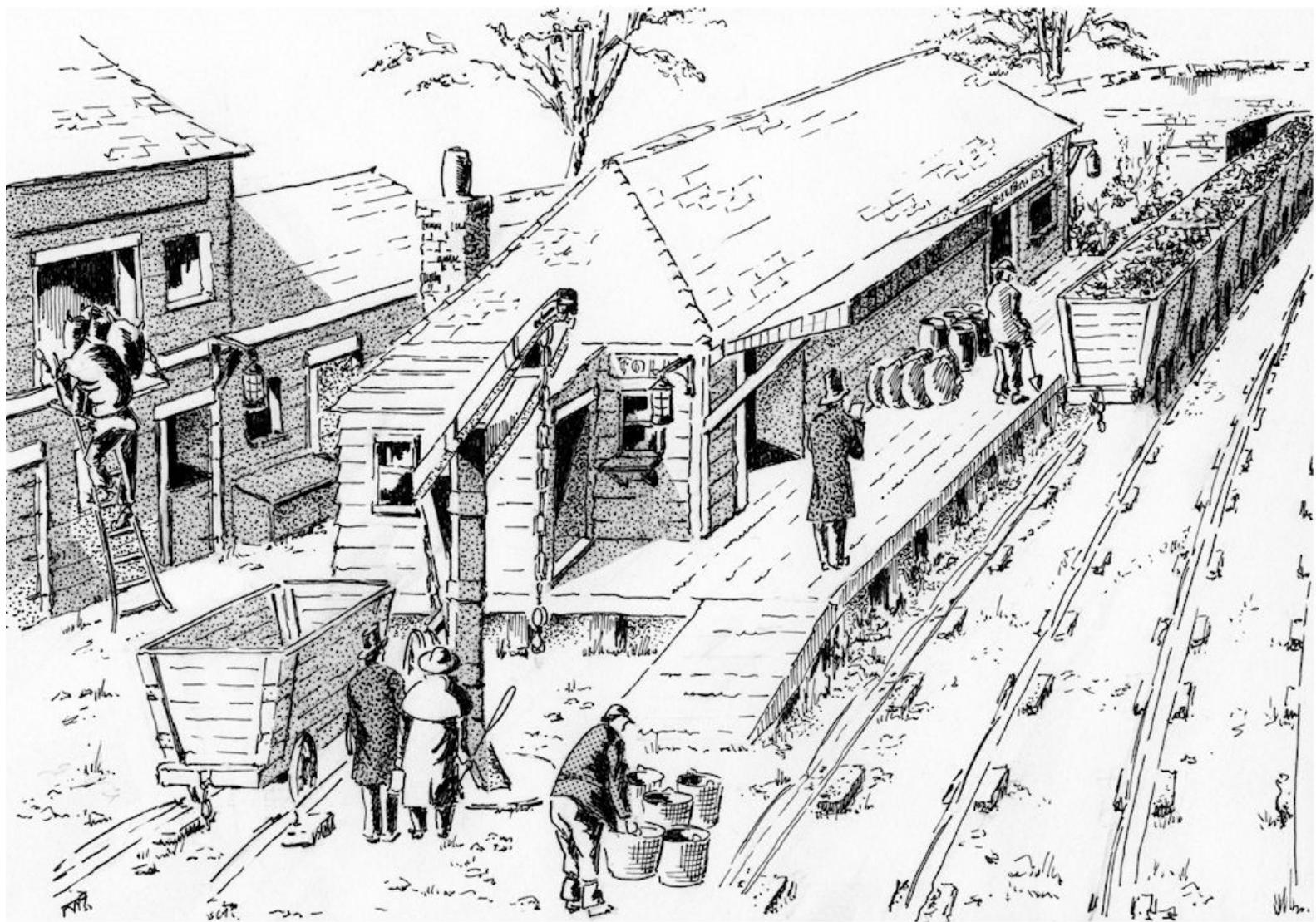
A hard path runs down the right hand boundary of the open space beside the River Wandle. At the High Street turn left to Colliers Wood Underground Station. At this point one can either walk along Christchurch and Church Roads (again on the line of the old route) for more than a mile or take bus no. 200, in both cases alighting at the Mitcham Parish Church. Cross the road to Church Path and follow it for a short distance to a footpath signpost on the right. The path leads to a footbridge and on the far side take the fenced path on the left to the Morden Road. Opposite is Ravensbury Park where the Wandle can be contacted for the last time (the) railway route has followed the river valley all the way from the Thames) and along to the right is the Morden Hall Deer Park belonging to the National Trust. Not far away is another N.T. property called Watermeads, the last survival of this once famous Surrey stream in a rustic setting. At one time there were more than forty mills below the source at Carshalton Ponds.

Turn left along Morden Road to Mitcham Station on the London Road. From here (as indicated by Tramway Path opposite) the S.I.R. track is now the modern Beddington Lane branch to Croydon. After a look at the old and interesting station entrance and buildings follow Tramway Path to the end, cross the line and turn right at the end of the path on The Close. It soon bends left by a telephone box. The path from the signpost continues the direction and takes you to a bridge over the railway. From this point a spur of the original S.I.R. went off to Hackbridge.

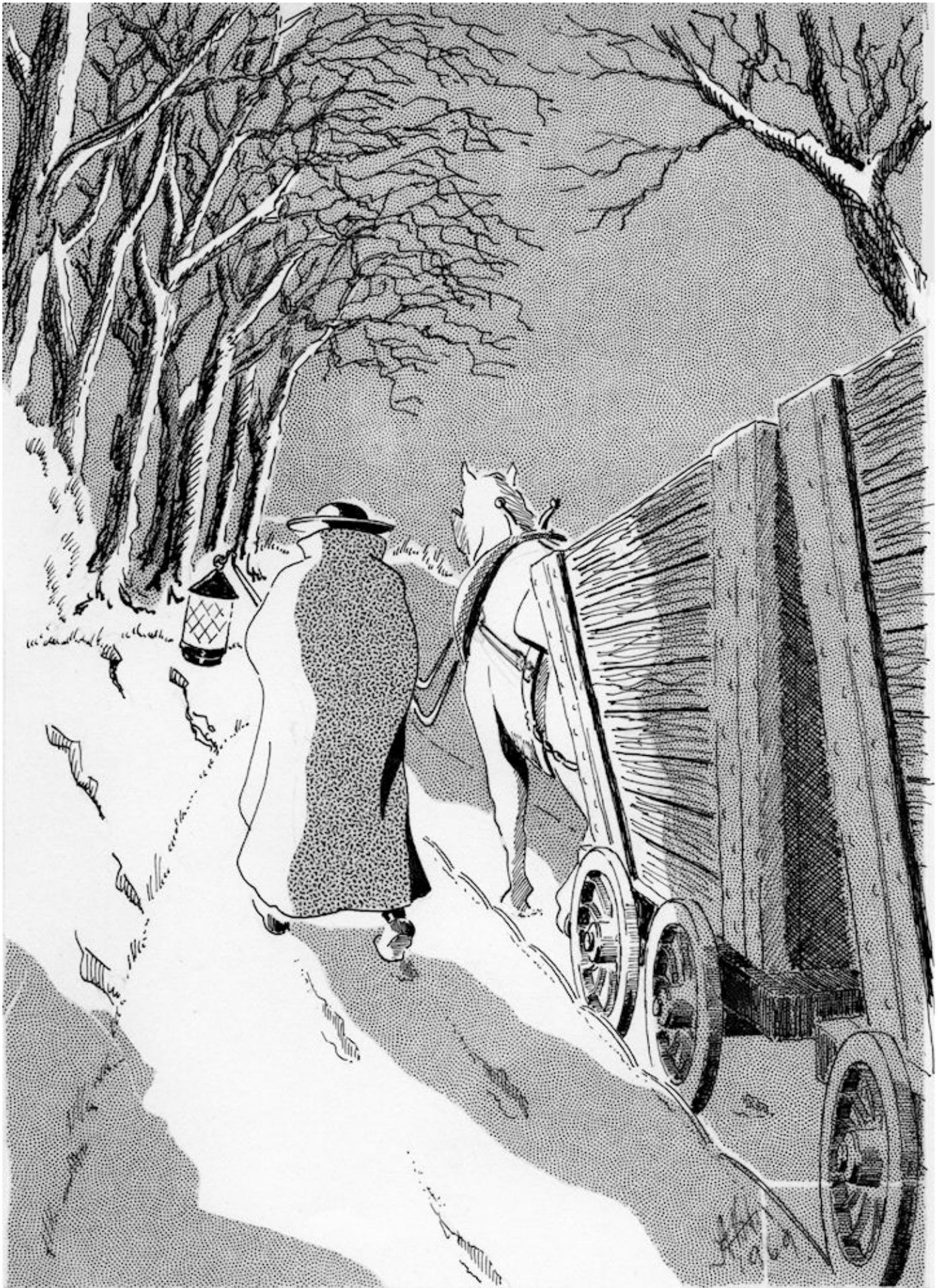
Cross the bridge and take the path to the left on the far side. Houses soon appear on the left. Look for a break in them and follow a narrow path to a cobbled roadway leading up a slope to the main road opposite Mitcham Junction Station. Turn down right. cross the road by the island and make for three posts on the side of Mitcham Common. The path a from these runs parallel with the railway in the direction of cooling towers on the horizon. Follow it over the common which, six times a year, will be ablaze with yellow gorse. and cross the footbridge at the end.

Take the continuing path along an irregular avenue of oaks by the boundary of the common and on arriving at the next railway (our last contact with tho S.I.R.) turn right to Beddington Lane Station. Cross the line. turn right beside it and follow road and path, still along the edge of the open space, until joining the Mitcham to Croydon Road near an inn. Bus no. 64 will take you to the latter. Alight near Croydon Parish Church and spend a little time searching for the toll and weighhouse in the Ellis David Road area.

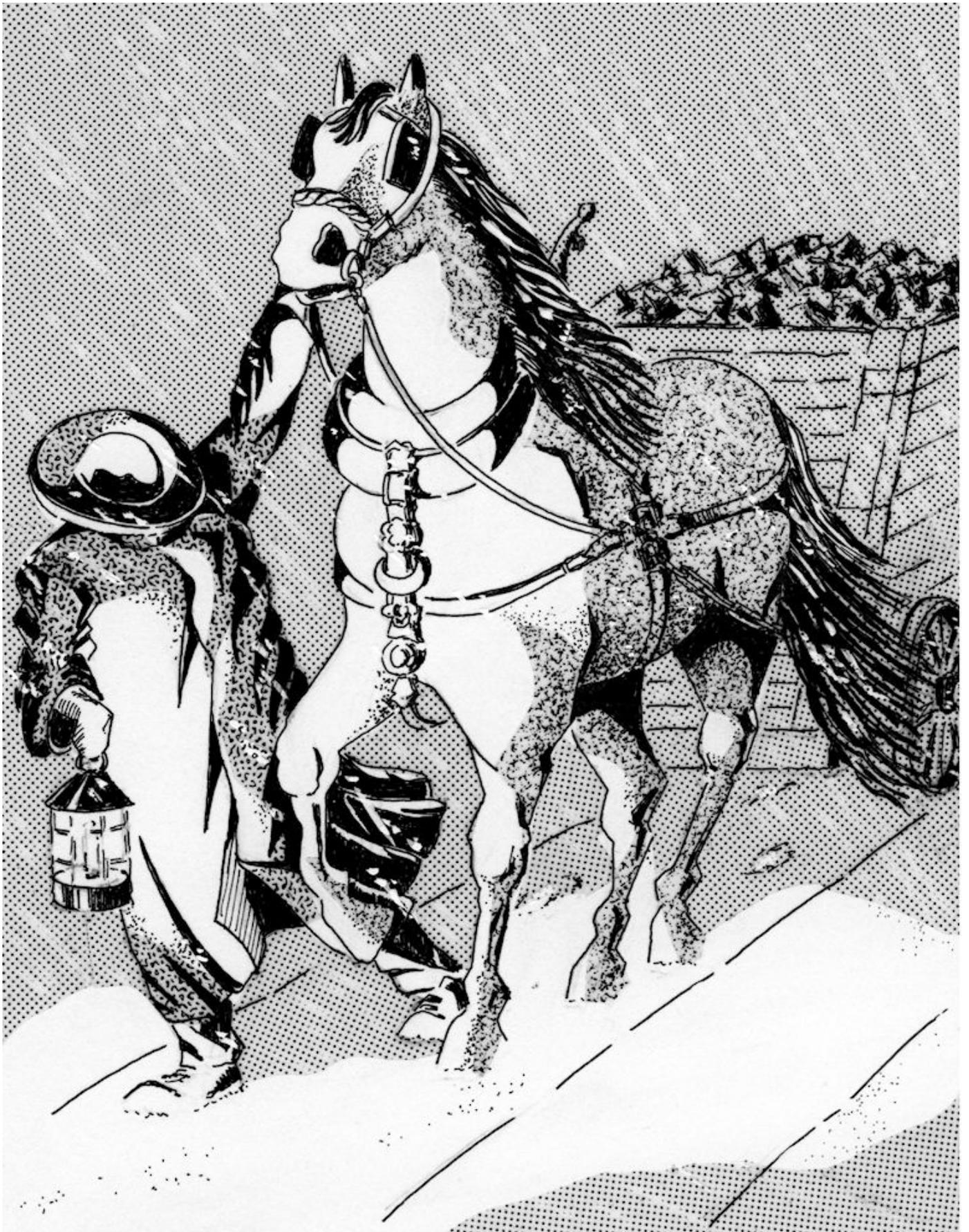




Mitcham Station S.I.R. c1820



WINTER NIGHT ON THE S.I.R., MITCHAM, c1820



SNOWSTORM on the S.I.R.



Site of Merton Abbey



wandle



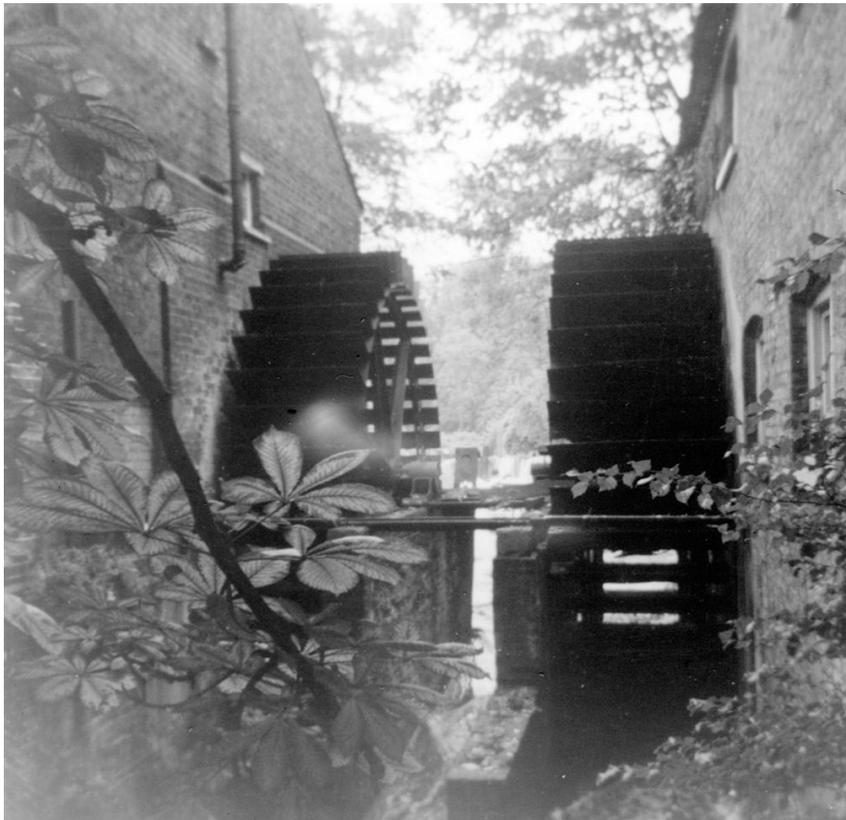
The old Mill carshalton



The old Mill carshalton



wandle at Beddington



Snuff Mills, Merton



Copper Mill, Plough Lane, Wimbledon



Aqueduct, Southfields



Snuff Mills, Merton



Fishers Cottage, Mitcham



Merton Parish Church



Ravensbury Mill