

Coombe Wood history

Coombe Wood was purchased, together with Coombe Wood House, from Mr W Cash then the Chairman of the Croydon Gas Company for £14,000 for the use of the public of Croydon. The 14 acres of Parkland were opened to the public in 1948. The area had been open over four hundred years ago when it was part of an estate with a large common field known as Coombe Field which stretched from Coombe Road to Park Hill.

The common became the property of James Bourdieu Senior (of Coombe House) in 1801 at the time of the Inclosures of Common Land. Mr Bourdieu had already purchased The Coombe Estate, including Coombe Lodge, House and Farm which totalled some 251 acres. Coombe Wood supplied water to the Coombe estate via three conduits which ran along the adjacent lane hence the name Conduit Lane. The gardens is divided into a series of rooms which together give an all year round display of shrubs and plants set against a backdrop of mature woodland.

Entering the gardens from Conduit Lane the visitor immediately sees the pond, terrace garden and the stables and cafe, however there are footpaths leading from this point to all the other garden rooms. The pond was dug to replace one in front of Coombe Lodge in 1845 by a pond maker called Clements and according to local history he made such a good job that the ghost that had frequented the old pond moved to the new one. The pond was known as Barons Pond and a sum in lieu of certain old public drinking rights was paid to the Corporation to keep the new one private. Two streams, (not spring water) flow into the pond, one of which tumbles over a waterfall. The water contains many interesting water plants and also ornamental fish.

Beside the Pond there is a Rock Garden which was only discovered by workmen when they were clearing the ground of undergrowth prior to the opening. A great variety of of Alpine and other plants grow amongst the rocks. When the gardens were opened they supported a variety of spring plants but had little to show in the summer and therefore it was decided to plant a Rose Garden to extend the flowering season into the summer. In Spring 1971 it was planted with roses donated by Nestle of Croydon.

A Winter Garden has been laid out in front of Coombe Wood House which provides a colourful display of Heaths and Heathers and also slow growing conifers and other shrubs which thrive in the acid soil. Extending behind the Winter garden are the Woodlands of Beech and Pine and a great variety of Rhododendrons and Azaleas which in the late spring and early summer provide a magnificent display of colour. A variety of wild birds are found in the woodlands and gardens and in 1974 the R.S.P.B. put a number of nest boxes in the woodland to encourage the birds to breed.

Beside the woodland there are the mixed borders of the Broad Walk which was the site of the Kitchen Garden to the House. These borders are at there best from July to September. The terrace garden beside the entrance was once a Fernery but this is now planted with seasonal bedding.

The brick arch between the pond and the terrace garden leads to the stable yard and stables which house the horses used by the Parks Departments Rangers who patrol the large areas of public woodland in the south of the borough. The cafe at the rear of the yard provides refreshment for visitors. The whole stableyard complex was put out of the view of Coombe Wood House by building it a small gravel pit. The twenty room House was built in 1898 by Mr. Arthur Lloyd and from the first housed a 3 manual Lewis Church Organ with the keyboard in the main entrance hall and the pipes fitted into the staircase panelling.

Unlike most organs it was originally driven by pipes from two large water tanks in the garden. Arthur Lloyd died a few years later and the house was purchased by W Cash Esq. who some 37 years later sold the house to the Corporation. The House was turned into a Convalescent home attached to Croydon General Hospital and then became a Childrens Home. The house has now been turned into a Restaurant. Just in front of the stable yard there is a small building called Pond Cottage, it is built from yellow brick and appears to be older than the adjacent stable complex.