

Waddon Ponds history

Today Waddon Ponds is the only place where the River Wandle can be seen in Croydon, although it used to flow from its source near the Swan and Sugarloaf, on the Brighton Road, through the grounds of the Archbishops of Canterbury's Palace and into Wandle Park. The river then flowed towards Waddon and into a large mill pond on the northern side of Mill Lane. The river continues through the Boroughs of Sutton, Merton, Wandsworth and into the Thames.

Most of Waddon Ponds is given to water-gardens with large weeping willows trailing their pendulous branches in the water. The ponds are fed by springs which arise at the junction of beds of sand and chalk with London Gravel Beds, the water flows north towards Mill Lane and what used to be the northern millpond and the River Wandle.

The name Waddon is thought to have been derived from wad-dun or woad hill. Woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) would have grown on the chalk hills and been used by ancient Britains who extracted blue dye from the plant to use as paint. When the houses were built at near-by Aldwick Road on Brandy Bottle Hill, west of the pond, traces of Bronze Age and Iron Age Man were found. Remains from the Iron Age were also found on the sandy slopes of Alton Road to the east of the ponds.

Waddon Ponds was part of a very old estate that held an area of 2000 acres for 500 years. The eighteenth century owner of Waddon Court Farm, John Dewey Parker entertained distinguished men of the day on his estate. The visitors included, Boscauwens, John Marshall the agriculturalist, Gros the antiquary, Arthur Young whose agricultural "Travels" became a classic of the time and it was also reputed that Lord Nelson stayed at the mansion and fished in the extensive lakes which stretch from today's site past Mill Lane to Waddon Marshes.

The Domesday books mention that there was a mill at the northern end of the ponds, it was a manorial mill which was used for grinding corn. The River Wandle had been dammed at the northern end to form a lake but the river was diverted at the end of the 19th century to the north and east. The area of land created was used for water cress beds then drained for allotments and finally industry was established on the site; the Mill closed down in 1928.

In 1910 records show that Waddon Ponds belonged to two estates, Waddon Court, which was owned by Mr Crowley, and Waddon Lodge which was owned by Miss Mary Waterall. When the two owners died the Corporation bought part of both estates in 1928 following a vigorous campaign by Mr Pescott Row an author of books about the beauties of England. To commemorate the efforts of Row another local author H.M. Tomlinson donated a sundial to the park.

The rest of both the estates was sold to developers and new houses were built in Waddon Court Road, Lodge Avenue, Limes Avenue and Wandle Side. There were two cottages outside the gates to the pond which had belonged to Mr Crowley and been used by his employees. The cottage that stood inside Waddon Ponds had belonged to Miss Waterall, and was used by her gardener. The windows of the cottage were built very high up so that the staff could not see the lady of the house strolling around the gardens and lawns. Next to cottage were the stables, cow sheds and coach house.

The ponds vary in depth and over a period of years, apparently to a pattern. There have been times when the pond has dried out completely and men have cut the vegetation that grew up with an Allen Scythe.

A variety of waterfowl can be seen on the water including Ducks and Coots.