Wandsworth Society

June 2026 Talk

Reclaiming Wandsworth's Heritage

A Necessity Not Whim


WANDSWORTH
MUSEUM
MUSEUM
ENTRANCE


est Hill Library and the Museums in Wandsworth
The Wandsworth Museum
was opened for the people of the
Borough of Wandsworth
by
Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt, MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport
Boris Johnson
Mayor of London


ONS
School


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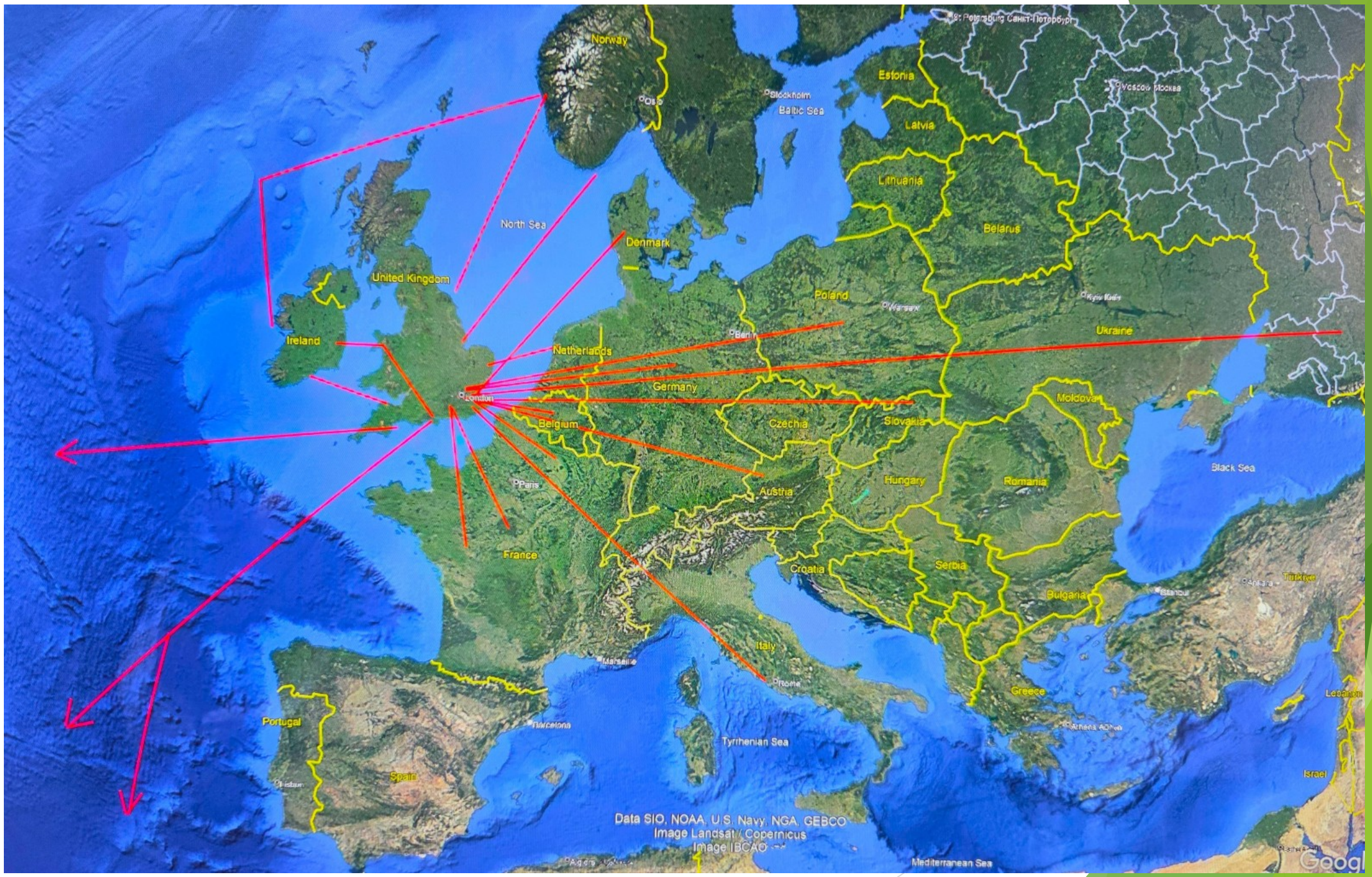

SAVE
WANDSWORTH
MUSEUM
SAVE WANDSWORTH MUSEUM

Reclaiming Wandsworth's Heritage

1. Who were the waves of invaders, immigrants, refugees & what did they contribute to our communal heritage.

2. Why Wandsworth blossomed into the great traffic jam it is today.

3. How should we present it, & why is it critical to future generations.


Norway
Oslo
Stockholm
Baltic Sea
Estonia
Latvia
Lithuania
Belarus
Moscow Москва
North Sea
Denmark
United Kingdom
Ireland
Poland
Warsaw
Berlin
Ukraine
Netherlands
Germany
London
Belgium
Czechia
Slovakia
Moldova
Black Sea
Paris
Austria
Hungary
Romania
France
Croatia
Serbia
Bulgaria
Italy
Marseille
Rome
Greece
Portugal
Barcelona
Tyrrhenian Sea
Spain
Israel
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
Image IBCAO
Mediterranean Sea



STEP 1. What have these visitors brought us?

- **CELTS:** Metal working crafts, design & decoration, the original Arthurian legend, Christmas Holly decoration, mirrors & Brewing Ale from Grain
- **ROMANS**: Town planning, Money, apples, pears, cherries, spices, herbs.
- **ANGLO-SAXONS**: Literature – Beowulf, Origin of early English language, the Shire System of Local Authorities, " a Bedrock of British Culture" quoting the BBC.
- **VIKINGS** 'Trial by Jury' & developed many towns into urban trading hubs –say English Heritage, & they succeeded in unifying the Anglo-Saxon patchwork of kingdoms.
- **NORMANS**: Architecture Cathedrals, Govt formal law, Doomsday Book, framework of Society, they drank Ale, cyder & wine – because they couldn't trust the water!!
- **DUTCH** refugees: Horticulture – Tulips, Heated greenhouses, Pendulum clock, Hose pipes, Fine painting, Hop-based brewing & Reintroduced Brick making.
- **FRENCH** Huguenots: Banking, Silk weaving, watch making & boosted Ind' Revolution
- **EMPIRE & JEWISH & IRISH** Refugees: cloth & raw materials / Jewish finance skills funded Royal projects/ Irish & Empire rebuilt Britain post WWs/public services & NHS

STEP 2. Why Wandsworth needs a proper museum

a. The impetus Empire gave Industrial Revolution in Wandle Valley
b. Wandsworth - The only town centre on the Wandle & Thames

a. ALL ABOUT GEOLOGY & ENERGY

- Major mills powered workshops in the town centre lagoon.
- Stane Street connects to Chichester & A3 to Portsmouth

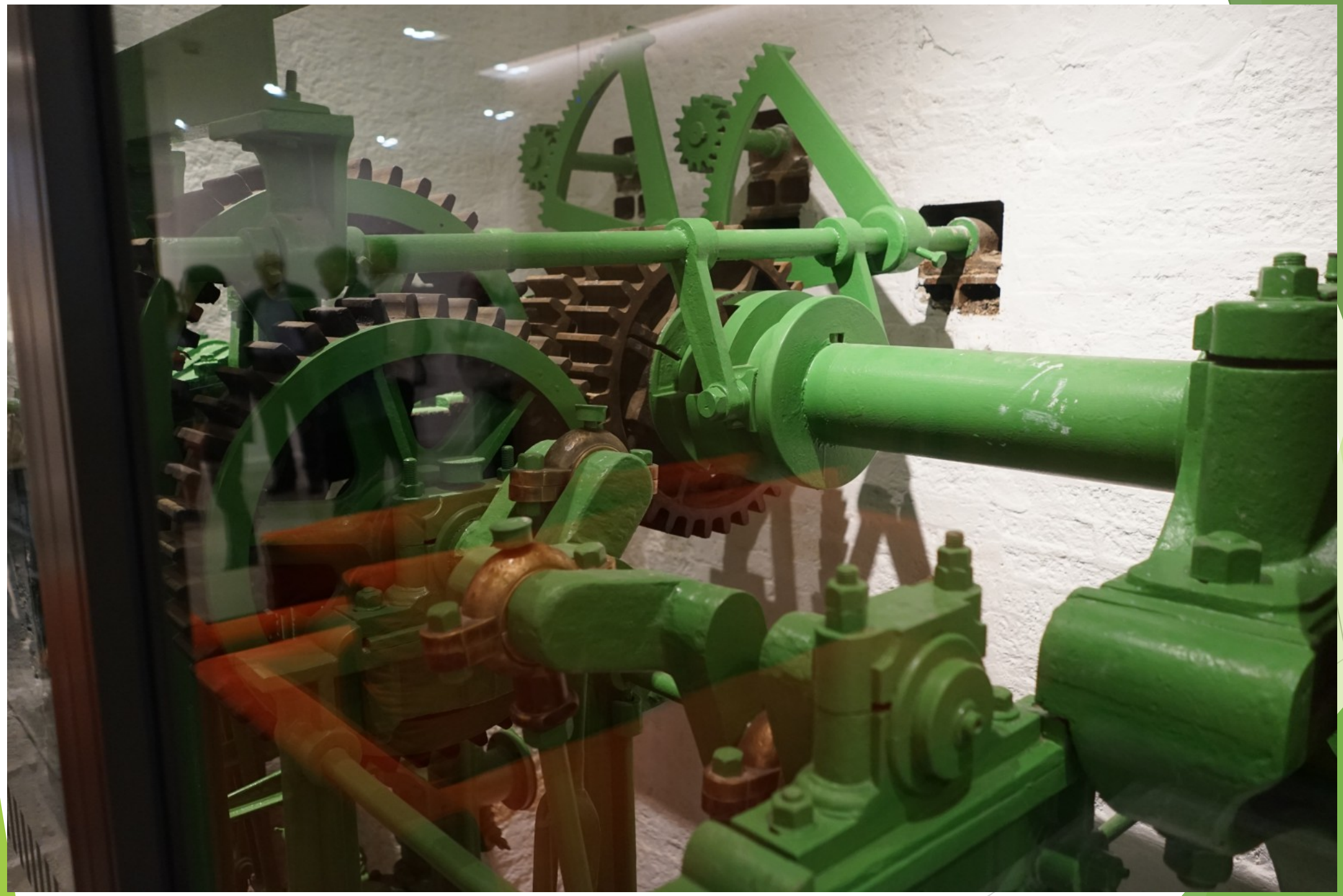
"The Hardest worked river in Europe "

- Fast flowing water = energy. it drops 58m fromsource 12 miles away.
- Wandle Valley became home to 20% of London's manufacturing.
- It exported manufactured goods back to Empire
- East India Company competed with Govt & generated 1/4 of World trade.
- Boosted in 1803 by the Surrey Iron Railway (1st PUBLIC railway).


Wandsworth Town
East Hill
King's Chik'n
TLScontact Visa Application
Wandsworth Town Hall
St Anne's Hill
Ashley Rd
King's Arms
Garratt Lane Old Burial Ground
Gravity MAX Wandsworth
Wandsworth Police Station
Buckhold Rd
Southside Shopping Centre
Garratt Ln
Decathlon
Sainsbury's
Borrodaile Rd
Broomhill Rd
Neville Gill Cl
Cineworld Wandsworth
Mapleton Cr
Earth
200 m











a. Wandle's UNIQUE GEOLOGY

The Wandle is a Chalk Stream

Chalk stream water is naturally filtered to high levels of purity

	Approx %
• If about 3 million rivers on the planet	100.00 %
• Only 250 are filtered clean by a chalk aquifer	0.01 %
• Only 36 are in SE England (rest in Yorkshire & Normandy	0.001 %
• Lets guess that the Wandle is one of the 10% fastest of 36?	0.0001 %

What did we do to what Wandle Trust call the world's best chalk stream?

Poisoned it for centuries then shoved it under the Arndale Centre!

Looking after this remarkable river is a priority & a duty.

River Wandle in Wandsworth

Traces of a rich history on the Riverbank

The Wandle rises in Waddon and Carshelton and flows into the Thames at Wandsworth. The names of the river and Wandsworth are thought to have come from 'Wendel's Worth', an old English word for 'enclosure' or 'homestead'.

Wandsworth has a rich industrial history, of which the Wandle was a vital ingredient. Its fast flow provided power for the mills and its plentiful clean water was ideal for dyeing and other processes such as calico printing and parchment manufacturing. Today there are very few buildings left on its banks to tell the tale, which has to be left largely to the visitor's imagination.

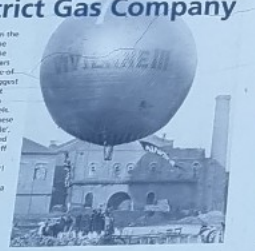
Even the river itself disappears into a tunnel, created when the present day shopping centre was built. Above ground it washes peacefully through King George's Park, then re-emerges at Wandsworth High Street where it flows on down to the Delta, past Ram Quarter which finally closed in 2006, having been a brewery site from about 1580.



The Wandle as it may never be seen again...

The Wandsworth and District Gas Company

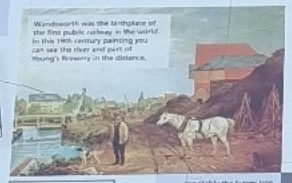
Operating from the Creek where the Wandle joins the Thames, 100 years ago this was one of the country's biggest gas companies. It even had its own fleet of coal vessels. The flagship of these was the 'SS Wandle', which distinguished itself by fighting off a U-boat attack in the first World War! Their cheap gas made Wandsworth a popular centre for balloonists.





The Surrey Iron Railway

Wandsworth was the birthplace of the first public railway in the world. In this 19th century painting you can see the river and part of Young's Brewery in the distance.



The railway was opened in 1803, and ran for 8 miles from the mouth of the Wandle to Merstham in Surrey. The important industries along the river needed to transport goods to the Thames. Instead of expanding the river into a navigable canal it was decided to build a railway. This was before the invention of steam locomotives, so the railway was horse-drawn.



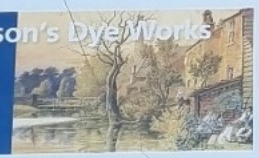
The iron rails were attached by pegs to separate stone blocks, rather than the wooden sleepers we are used to with locomotive drawn railways, so that the horses could walk between the rails.

Inevitably the Surrey Iron Railway was killed off by competition from steam power and finally closed in 1846. Today it's just a ghost. Very few relics survive, but you can see three of the railway's stone sleeper blocks set into the pavement in Garratt Lane near the Wandle tunnel.



Williamson's Dye Works

A beautiful view painted in 1860 of the Dye Works which stood on Garratt Lane by Mapleton Road Bridge. Its specialty was Wandsworth scarlet dye, famous throughout Europe and used for Cardinals' hats in Rome because the bright red colours were so fast they didn't run in wet weather!



All Saints Church

The modest Georgian church that stands in the High Street near the Wandle bridge isn't Wandsworth's grandest, and it suffers from the busy main road, but it still brings to mind Wandsworth's origins as a pleasant market town round the river. The church dates from 1780, with parts of the tower constructed a century earlier. Though largely rebuilt after wartime bomb damage, it still retains its charm.



Left: Engraving of the church in 1630

Below: View in 1890 showing The King's Arms

The Upper Mill

This enormous mill straddled the Wandle where the shopping centre now stands. It was destroyed by fire in 1928. The Upper, Middle and Lower Mills were the largest on the Wandle and were all used to grind corn. In the 1800's the Upper and Middle Mills produced 60,000 sacks of flour a year.



River Wandle Pollution

Wandle Valley

Action against River Pollution

Pollution of different kinds affects the river in different ways. Fly tipping and dumping of rubbish can cause blockages in the channel which can lead to localised flooding. Pollution such as run-off from roads and chemical spills can kill many of the creatures that form a crucial part of the food chain within the river. River flies in particular are very sensitive to this kind of pollution and their presence or absence can indicate if the river is beginning to be affected.

Join the Pollution Patrol

The Wandle Trust and Environment Agency have teamed up to help monitor and respond to pollution incidents on the Wandle. If you see pollution on the Wandle, report it to the Environment Agency Hotline on 0800 80 70 60 or to join the patrol visit Wandle Trust website - www.wandletrust.org/pollution-patrol.html

Pollution survey target groups

These invertebrates all use the river for a key part of their life cycle. Each group can tolerate a different amount of pollution. The Gammarus can tolerate pollution. The Mayfly and Stonefly nymphs cannot.



Gammarus



Mayfly



Stonefly

Cased Caddis (Cases of various materials)



Plant Stems etc

Plant material (Square Case)

Sand Grains (Round Case)

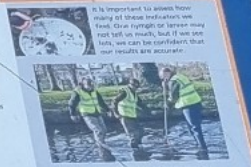
Sand Grains (Flat Case)

Shells and Sand Grains

Plant Material

Plant Material (Round Case)

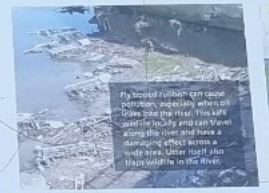
Caddis are a key species to be found in the Wandle. Some use material in the river to make a mobile home to carry around with them. They are moderately tolerant of pollution, but can tell us if the water quality is steadily improving.



It is important to assess how many of these indicators we find. One nymph or larvae may not tell us much, but if we see lots, we can be confident that our results are accurate.

To get a sample of the key indicator species, volunteers take a 'kick sample' for 3 minutes at regular survey points along the Wandle. Landowners must give permission for this as the results tell them more about their stretch of the river and how much pollution is affecting it.

Fly tipping removed from Wandle by volunteer groups



Fly tipped rubbish can cause pollution, especially when oil leaks into the river. This kills wildlife locally and can travel along the river and have a damaging effect across a wide area. Litter itself also traps wildlife in the River.



Pollution along the Wandle includes litter and debris which can block the channel and cause localised flooding.



Fly tipping removed from Wandle by volunteer groups

The Riverfly Partnership



Volunteers analyse the samples of invertebrates from the surveys. Landowners must give permission for this. The results tell them more about their stretch of the river and how much pollution is affecting it.

wandle









STEP 3. WE NEED TO DO MORE

We looked at the improving the basic concept of Museums

- **Make it more relevant, more useful, more engaging?**
- **Make it into a Culture Cluster :**

  Museum + Art Gallery + Studios + Shop + Café + library + Offices.
- **Operating & maintenance costs are rationalised.**
- **Introducing Environmental Issues can access educational funding?**

We found Brent Council had done exactly that in Willesden High St

WBC went to look & learn – then no word back in 2 years

But what if we changed the Museum concept itself?


INSPIRE
AND BE
INSPIR
THE LIBRARY
DENTAL CLINIC


The city meets the country
The city meets the country

Enter the MOOF – Museum Of Our Future

- It braids Environmental narrative into traditional historic vignettes.
- Includes a distinct "How Green is Our lifestyle rating" section
- Add the FUTURE ROOM - presenting lifestyle choices & their impact on Global Warming & their consequences on Climate Change

This entitles a Museum of History to become a

Museum Of Our Future.

IN CONCLUSION

We've looked at:

- **who we were, where we came from & what each wave contributed.**
- **how our Heritage Story grew in scale through empire & hydro power**
- **& sadly ended up poisoning the valley's biodiversity.**
- **So we changed the concept of a museum to a MOOF to make a difference**


ensuring
a future
for our past
Heritage Malta
NATURAL HISTORY
www.heritagemalta.org

Last word

In Valetta, the museum of Malta's sign says "A Future for our Past".
Should our sign say:

"Our Future Depends on Understanding Our Present"

A museum of the future help's us do just that because understanding that challenge is critical to finding ways to mitigate its impact.
So it needs to at a focal point:

Wandsworth Town Centre