

# WANDLE VALLEY CONSERVATION AREA



CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Amended Draft, revised following public consultation.

New text shown underlined and deleted text shown struck through.

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
BACKGROUND	4
STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT	4
MAP OF THE CONSERVATION AREA	5
<b>CHARACTER APPRAISAL</b>	8
LOCATION AND EXTENT	8
DESIGNATION HISTORY	8
EXTENSIONS TO THE CONSERVATION AREA	8
REGIONAL CONTEXT	9
POPULATION	9
TOPOGRAPHY OF THE AREA	10
GEOLOGY OF THE AREA	10
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AREA	10
<b>MEDIEVAL: MERTON PRIORY</b>	11
<b>MERTON PLACE</b>	12
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SURROUNDING AREA	13
<b>ABBEGATE HOUSE</b>	13
<b>RIVER WANDLE</b>	14
<b>SAXON: ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY</b>	15
<b>STANE STREET</b>	16
ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA	17
REVIEW OF HISTORIC MAPS	18
SURREY IRON RAILWAY	19
OTHER RAILWAYS IN THE AREA	21
ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURROUNDING AREA	22
PREVAILING OR FORMER USES	23
ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC QUALITY OF BUILDINGS	25
SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUAL OR GROUPS OF BUILDINGS	27
DISTINCTIVE AND TRADITIONAL BUILDING MATERIALS AND LOCAL DETAILS	32

<b>OPEN SPACE</b>	37
<b>LANDSCAPED PARKLAND</b>	37
<b>GREEN SPACES</b>	38
<b>URBAN SPACES</b>	38
<b>BOUNDARIES AND GROUND SURFACES</b>	40
<b>STREET FURNITURE AND MATERIALS</b>	41
<b>ELEMENTS THAT DETRACT FROM THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE CONSERVATION AREA</b>	41
<b>NEUTRAL AREAS</b>	44
<b>REVIEW OF CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY</b>	45
<b>REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	46
<b>APPENDIX A: STATUTORY LISTED BUILDINGS</b>	48
<b>APPENDIX B: LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS</b>	50

# WANDLE VALLEY CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

## INTRODUCTION

The designation of conservation areas is a legislative duty of local authorities. These areas comprise "areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance". Local authorities also have a duty to from time to time to review whether any further designations are needed. The Wandle Valley Conservation Area was originally designated by the Council in November 1990 and was extended in April 2000. The present boundaries of the conservation area are shown on Map 1, overleaf.

## BACKGROUND

The Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG 15) advises local authorities to periodically review existing conservation areas and their boundaries. PPG 15 also advises local authorities to define and record, as clearly as possible, the special architectural or historic interest that justifies each conservation area's designation, through an assessment of the elements that contribute to an area's character.

Character assessments are useful tools that not only set out the specific characteristics for which an area has been designated as a conservation area, but also help the Council to assess the impact of development proposals on the character or appearance of a conservation area. They also provide a useful framework within which property owners and developers can work when designing new development or planning alterations to buildings, within conservation areas, by setting out and describing the special context to which any new development will need to relate.

This appraisal aims to fulfil four key roles: -

- a) to outline and explain the historical development of the area;
- b) to define the special character and interest of the conservation area, and its surroundings, in relation to its architecture, topography, open spaces and townscape and the relationships between them;
- c) to, on the basis of this assessment, review the existing conservation area boundaries; and
- d) to identify opportunities for the preservation and enhancement of the area.

This Character Assessment for the Wandle Valley Conservation Area has been prepared by the Council's Design and Conservation Team in accordance with Guidelines issued by English Heritage and Planning Policy Guidance Note 15.

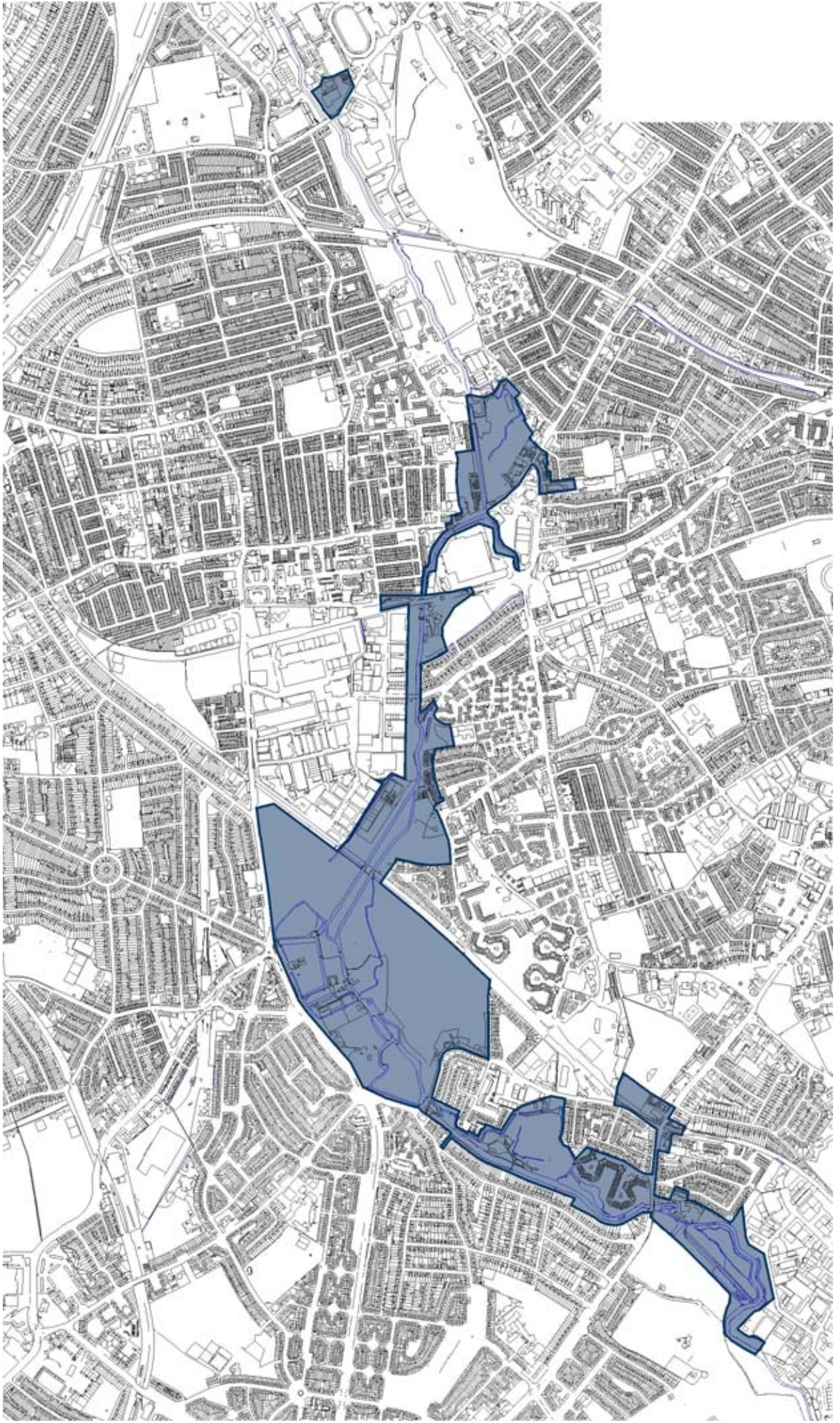
## STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT

This character assessment covers the whole of the conservation area and provides an analysis of the area's history and development and identifies the main architectural features and important qualities that contribute to the area's special character. The appraisal is not intended to be comprehensive and the omission of any particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest.

The document starts with a brief history of the designation of the conservation area and outlines the extent of the area's designation.

An outline of the history of the area and its development is provided as a background to its historic significance. A description and explanation is provided of the area's geology, topography, archaeology and ecology with a more detailed summary of the origins and

# MAP OF THE CONSERVATION AREA



urban development of the conservation area and adjacent areas and the building types and styles based on research and site inspections. This forms the basis for a more detailed analysis of the conservation area. To achieve this the whole conservation area has been broken down into a series of linked sub-areas that have their own specific historical background and/or defining features. These areas are:-

### **Area 1: Copper Mill Lane**

A small separate area to the north of Plough Lane, isolated from main Conservation Area embracing the site of an eighteenth century copper mill. The site is likely to have been occupied by watermills before this.

### **Area 2: Colliers Wood**

An area extending between Bygrove Road to the north and Merton High Street to the south this area has formed a particular focus for riverside industry from at least the medieval period onwards.

### **Area 3: Merton Priory**

An area extending between Merton High Street to the north and Windsor Avenue to the south it embraces part of the site of Merton Priory, and includes the present Merton Abbey Mills Craft Market. It has been the site of various industries since the Dissolution of the Priory in the 16th century.

### **Area 4: Phipps Bridge**

The area between Windsor Avenue to the north and the Croydon Tramlink track to the south, this is an area bounded by a large housing estate to the east and the Merton industrial estate to the west and embraces properties

within Phipps Bridge Road. The area includes Bunce'e Meadow currently occupied by Dean City Farm.

### **Area 5: The Parks**

#### **i) Morden Hall Park and House ii) Ravensbury Park**

Covering both Morden Hall and Ravensbury Parks the remnants of estates associated with large houses. This area has been further sub-divided into two areas based on the individual parks. Area 5.i: Morden Hall Park and Area 5.ii: Ravensbury Park.

### **Area 6: Mitcham**

#### **i) Station**

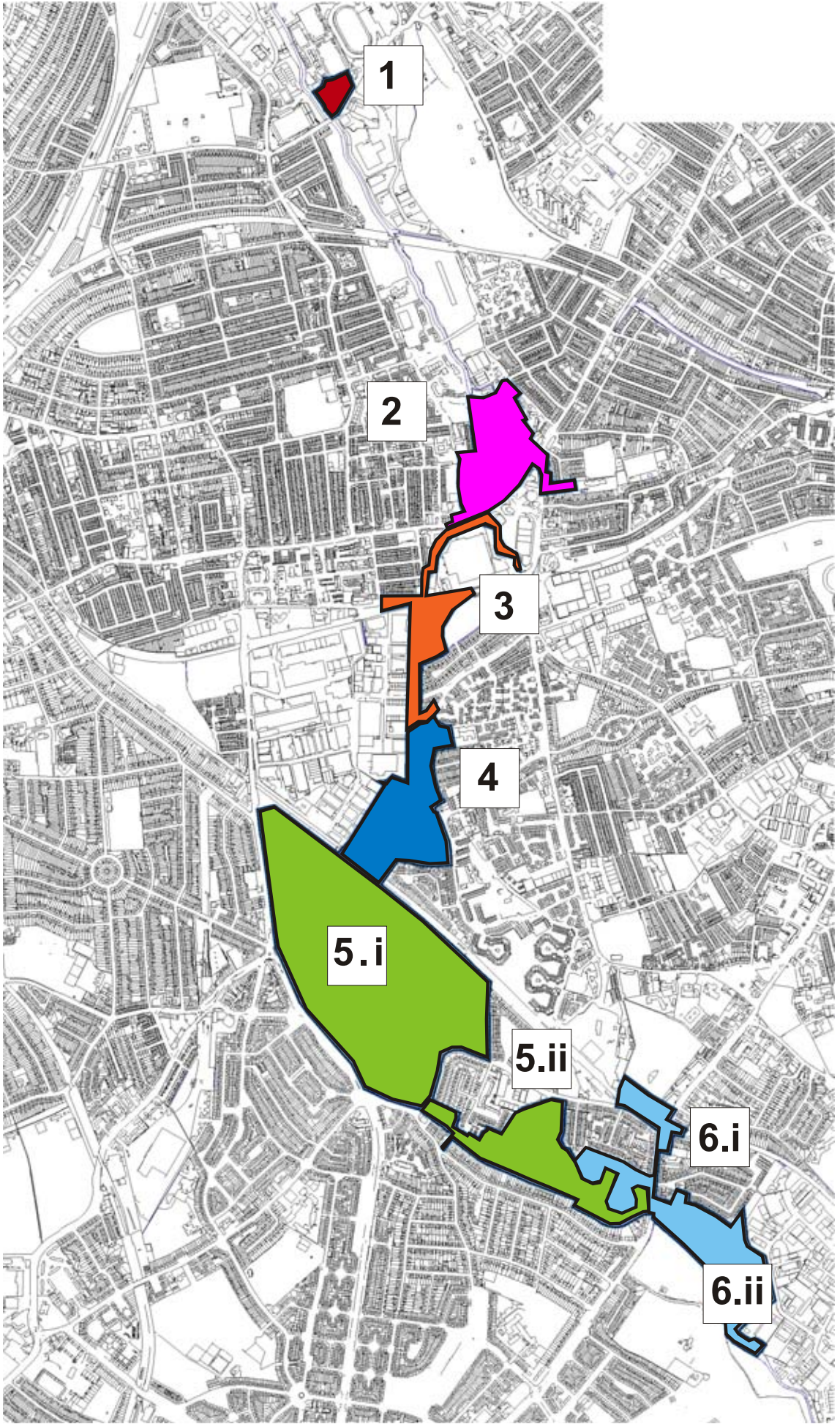
An area around the former Mitcham Station comprising a group of important historic buildings.

#### **ii) Watermeads:**

The area covering the "Watermeads" housing development, National Trust land and the Grove Mill complex. Once the site of several watermills, one dating to Domesday. The National Trust land is an important riverine wet land area and is now a nature reserve.

Merton Council will take this character appraisal and its recommendations into account when considering applications for new development and alterations and improvements to buildings. A separate 'Design Guide' has been prepared which provides advice to owners and developers on improvements that can be carried to preserve and enhance their area, copies of this leaflet can be obtained from the London Borough of Merton.

# MAP OF THE CONSERVATION AREA SUB-AREAS





# CHARACTER APPRAISAL

## LOCATION AND EXTENT OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The conservation area runs roughly north to south through the Borough following the course of the River Wandle, which flows northwards through the Borough from Beddington in the south towards Wandsworth where the Wandle joins the River Thames. The conservation area extends to either side of the river to cover areas of parkland and the surrounding commercial and residential areas; it extends over an area of approximately 100 hectares (246 Acres).

## DESIGNATION HISTORY

The Council designated the Wandle Valley area in November 1990, following a Borough-wide review to assess the potential for further designation of conservation areas. The particular characteristics for which the area was originally designated include: -

1. The area's historical background particularly its association with:
  - "Stane Street", a Roman Road that linked London Bridge to Chichester on the South Coast;
  - Merton Priory founded in the 12th Century, part of which is now a Scheduled Monument;
  - The Surrey Iron Railway;
  - Early industrialisation, particularly riverside industry including water mills; as well as
  - Large country house estates the former grounds of which survive as areas of 'parkland' adjoining the River Wandle.
2. The significant numbers of high quality listed and locally listed buildings sited on or near the river;
3. The area's archaeological importance,
4. The area's topography deriving from the Wandle Valley,

5. The special detailing of buildings;
6. The quality of open spaces and generally; and
7. The relatively low built area footprint and the way the built form fits into a wide area of predominantly open space.

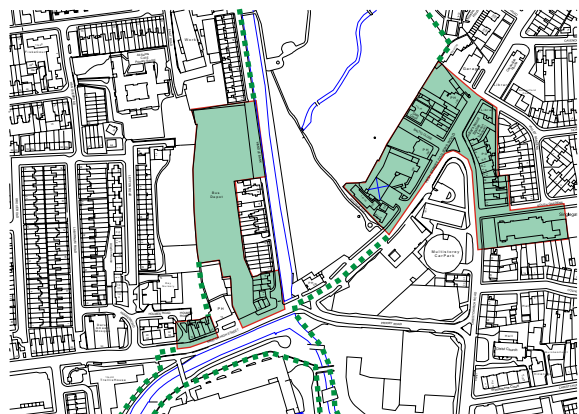
## EXTENSIONS TO THE CONSERVATION AREA

A number of extensions to the conservation area were agreed following a boundary review, in April 2000. Additional areas designated include: -

- I) The former site of an eighteenth century Copper Mill, Mill House and mill workers cottages in Copper Mill Lane.



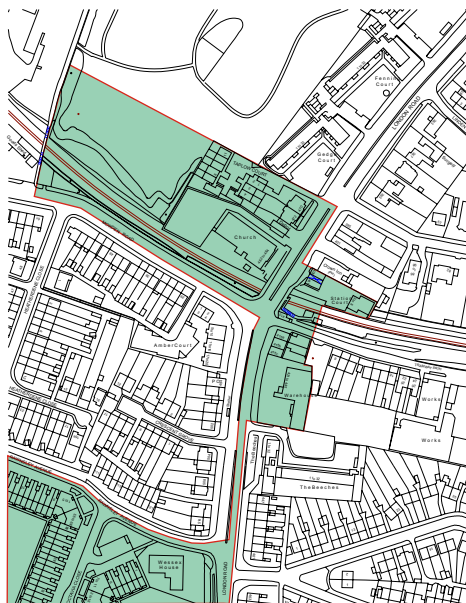
- II) Areas fronting High Street, Colliers Wood, Christchurch Road and Merton High Street.



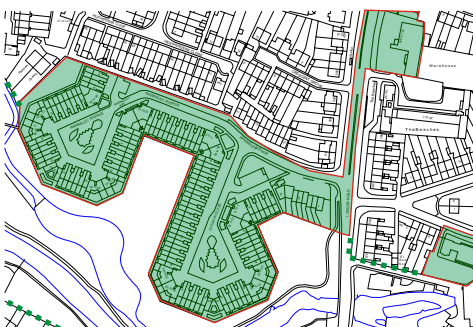
- III) Areas of the Scheduled Ancient Monument at the Merton Priory site.



- IV) Additional areas in London Road, Mitcham including the Grade II Listed former station building.



- V) 1970s housing in Octavia Close and Rawsley Avenue.



The conservation area is a linear area, which is given cohesion by its riverside character.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Wandle River is one of the main tributaries of the River Thames running from Waddon Ponds near Croydon in south London, to Wandsworth, in south-west London. It is recognised within the Mayor's London Plan as being of strategic importance and it forms part of the "Blue Ribbon Network". The Wandle Valley is highlighted as an area with brownfield development opportunities, pockets of deprivation, a need for revitalisation of the Croydon office market, and needing to build on potential links with Gatwick. There are moves to improve transport infrastructure within the area including Thameslink 2010 project to upgrade and extend the existing Thameslink network.

## POPULATION

The way the area has become populated is evidenced in historic maps, planning records and information gathered through archaeological investigation. These indicate population densities remaining low starting with small nuclei of settlements associated with mill complexes followed by gradual development of the larger estates. There is some evidence to suggest centres of population existing in the locality during medieval and Roman times, but little documentary information exists as to exact location or numbers. Notwithstanding this a pagan Anglo-Saxon 5th - 7th century cemetery, excavated near Ravensbury Park, has been estimated to have supported a community of between 50 and 100 persons. Little evidence has been revealed of an early settlement that ought to have existed adjacent to Merton Priory although there is later evidence of Merton Village, a linear settlement running the length of Merton High Street and Kingston Road, part of which now forms the modern centre of Colliers Wood, over which part of the conservation area extends. Later maps show increased development activity,

although, apart from the residential development at the Watermeads Estate during the 1970s, this has mainly taken place within areas surrounding the conservation area.

Population growth in the area since the 1970s, when the last major residential development took place at Watermeads, Mitcham, has mainly been achieved through development and conversion of former industrial building sites, such as at the Connolly's and Ravensbury Mills. However, further residential development is anticipated within the Merton Priory area to the south and east of Merton Abbey Mills. Areas adjacent to the conservation area, particularly within and to the north of Colliers Wood have been subject to greater change as larger former industrial sites have been re-developed for residential and retail use.

The modern conservation area is not based on a particular centre of population, although it extends over Colliers Wood, a designated Urban Centre within Merton's Unitary Development Plan. The conservation area is not aligned to the boundaries of any particular defined administrative area on which population data is conventionally assembled. In terms of its character, the conservation area extends over areas of relatively low population density in relation to adjacent areas and Greater London as a whole and is of a predominantly suburban character. Between Colliers Wood and Mitcham, the conservation area extends over mainly parkland, riverside habitats and areas of former river based industries. Much of this area remains in predominantly non-residential use. The population of the conservation area as a consequence has remained relatively low with the main centres of resident population located within Colliers Wood and Mitcham/Watermeads.

## TOPOGRAPHY OF THE AREA

The Wandle Valley conservation area, as its name suggests, occupies a

shallow valley created by the River Wandle and its floodplain. This made the area attractive to early settlement because the gravel and brickearth terraces proved easier to cultivate than the heavier clays elsewhere in the London Basin. The River itself was once famous as one of England's finest Trout rivers. To either side of the river the land rises towards Wimbledon Ridge to the west and the range of hills extending through Crystal Palace, Sydenham and Forest Hill to the east. The original contours within Morden Hall Park have been distorted by extensive modern land-raising.

## GEOLOGY OF THE AREA

The underlying geology of the area comprises deposits of London Clay overlying solid chalk at a depth of several 70 metres below ground at Merton Priory. In places the London Clay has been overlain by terrace gravels, which in turn have been partly removed or overlain in places by alluvial deposits laid down by the River Wandle. Although relatively insignificant today, the river was in the past important both as a source water and as a means of transport power; ~~the alluvial fills of the valley produced lighter soils which were amenable to early agriculture and settlement.~~

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AREA

The conservation area extends over a number of Archaeological Priority Zones (APZs) that have alluvial archaeology (Wandle Valley Alluvium) and water-based industry as their themes (Wandle/Copper Mill Lane, Wandle/Colliers Wood and Wandle Mitcham) and Nucleated Settlement: Communication Routes (Stane Street). The area also extends over APZs based on the sites of Post-Medieval Estates and Gardens (Merton Place and Morden Hall and Park) and Nucleated Settlement: Late Saxon & Medieval Villages (Mitcham Village).

## MEDIEVAL: MERTON PRIORY

The scheduled area of Merton Priory covers the site of the church and domestic buildings of the former Augustinian Priory of St. Mary, which was founded in 1114 and demolished in 1538.

Two early accounts published summaries survive of a 14th/15th century manuscript detailing the founding of Merton Priory (London College of Arms Arundel MS28) survive. *The Records of Merton Priory* edited by Major Alfred Heales of 1898 and *The Environs of London* Vol. 1 by Revd Daniel Heaton Lysons of 1796 1792. There are some discrepancies between the two accounts. Heales account, whilst good for its time, has been subject to more recent research and extensively corrected.

The Manor of Merton came into the possession of Henry I, the third and youngest son of William the Conqueror, after the Norman Conquest. In 1114 he gave the 'Ville' of Merton to a Norman knight called Gilbert who immediately proceeded to found a Priory dedicated to Blessed Virgin Mary. He built a Parish Church on present site of St. Mary's in 1115, possibly on the former site of an Anglo-Saxon Church, and immediately set about the founding and building of the Priory. Gilbert organised a community with Robert Bayle or de Tywe, the sub prior of a monastic house of Augustine Canons at Huntingdon. Friends and court connections of Gilbert gave gifts of money and estates towards the cost of setting up and maintaining the Priory.

Gilbert secured Royal patronage by winning the support of Queen Matilda, Henry I's first wife who visited the Priory several times twice to see its construction and continued to take an active interest in it. On completion of the first wooden buildings she brought her son Prince William in order to interest him in the welfare of the monastery should he become king. Queen Matilda died in 11178 and unfortunately Prince William drowned in the White Ship, less than three years later in 1120 and never succeeded to the throne.

Attempts at transferring the whole of the Manor of Merton to the Priory initially failed when Henry I, being averse to the settlement of lands on religious houses, initially refused to give his royal consent. A Charter of the Royal Foundation was eventually granted by Henry I for the establishment of a monastery, dated 1121-22, following a visit by Gilbert and the Prior to the King at Winchester. The Manor of Merton was then publicly surrendered to the Prior and his brethren. Gilbert died there on 26th July 11295.

The Priory was a source of employment, which contributed to stability in the area at a time of some upheaval, it also may have provided treatment for sick villagers. The Priory is also documented as having its own quarry, however there is no information regarding its whereabouts. which at dissolution was documented as being at Tullsworth, now Chaldon, Surrey.

There were 31 Priors in total and the last, John Ramsey, consented to its surrender in April 1538.

The Priory was dissolved and almost completely demolished in the sixteenth century 1538 and by the 19th Century nothing visibly remained of the Church or its ancillary buildings except the remains of one chapel. The Priory site is however protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and parts of the monastic church complex have been archaeologically excavated, and the foundations to the 'Chapter House' are preserved beneath Merantun Way. During the Civil Wars the Priory grounds were secured for use as a garrison. Cromwellian armour and breastplates have been excavated within the Priory grounds.

The area was subsequently used for calico printing after demolition of the Priory, including the old Liberty Print Works. Early excavations by Colonel H. F. Bidder, a local antiquary who lived south of the river Wandle in Mitcham, revealed the exact location and basic ground plan, as well as some of the internal flooring of the main church and the Chapter House. Further excavations were carried out for the Surrey Archaeological Society by D. J. Turner, by McCracken and Bruce between 1986-1990 and more recently by the Museum of London Archaeology Service.

Remnants of the perimeter wall to Merton Priory also survive in many places and these are included on the Statutory List.

Evidence from excavations for the Surrey Archaeological Society by D. J. Turner suggests that the area has been settled in one form or another since before the Roman invasion. The route of 'Stane Street', a Roman Road linking Chichester with London dating from second half of 1st century, is an area of significant archaeological potential that cuts across the conservation area in the vicinity of Merton High Street. The former site of Merton Priory is located within the area and is by far the most significant archaeological site and is inscribed as a scheduled ancient monument.

The open spaces which form much of the conservation area were liable to flooding and not suitable for settlement and so survived as parkland.

Archaeologically there are numerous possibilities including possible prehistoric trackways of the type known to have been constructed across waterlogged land, examples of which have been revealed in Bermondsey, East London, Somerset and elsewhere. Close to the river, there is also the possibility of votive deposits ('wet region')

## MERTON PLACE

Adjacent to the conservation area to the west along Merton High Street is the site of Horatio Nelson's former residence, Merton Place, which is designated as an Archaeological Priority Zone with post-Medieval Estates and Gardens as its theme

The site of Admiral Nelson's former home and its landscaped grounds, Merton Place, was located immediately to the west of the conservation area.

The house was built c.1750, between the village of Merton and the River Wandle, possibly on the site of an earlier, medieval, moated structure, to the south of Merton High Street. The house was moated and was allegedly incorporated into its landscaping of the grounds and the gardens were beyond the moat. The moat was named by Nelson as "The Nile". It was located at the southern end of its grounds which extended as far as Quick's Road to the north and Merton Road to the west, well south of the house and to the north to the present South Park Road, west to Merton Road and beyond Morden Road. The house, which was set back from the road was situated approximately on the present site of Doel Close. It was the only house both owned and occupied by Admiral Nelson. The house was eventually demolished by 1823. The nineteenth-century estate included parts of the medieval Merton Grange lands, and the former site of Merton Priory's dove house.

The house and grounds were completely built over, with some of the names of new residential streets (e.g. Hamilton Road, Hardy Road, Victory Road, Trafalgar Road) reflecting the former famous owner.

There is a plaque on one of the blocks of flats indicating the site of Merton Place.

## THE ABBEY GATE HOUSE and ABBEY HOUSE

The Merton Place Archaeological Priority Zone also extends over the former sites of the Abbey Gate House and Abbey House that once stood within the outer precinct of the Abbey. Abbey Gate House was located close to Merton High Street at its junction with Mill Road, immediately to the west of the conservation area on a site within the outer perimeter to Merton Priory that had formerly been occupied by some 15th Century tile kilns. After dissolution of the Priory the Abbey Gate House became a private residence and became one of the most historical houses in Merton due to its association with many famous people including a number of notable occupiers with naval connections. Occupiers of the house included the widow of Captain Cook who stayed there during the summer months with her cousin Rear-Admiral Isaac Smith who accompanied Captain Cook on his voyage to the south seas on the 'Endeavour' and who was allegedly the first to set foot on Australian soil.

The extensive grounds to the house were surrounded by a high wall and contained a large fishpond and servants cottages. The building was extended in the mid-18th Century but was demolished at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Abbey House was located close to the present course of the Wandle, just South of Merantun Way. It is believed that it was originally used as a guest-house of the Priory for visitors not permitted to be accommodated within the Priory itself. When the building was demolished in 1914 a Norman carved stone arch was discovered. This was dismantled and reconstructed in the grounds of St Mary's Parish Church in Merton Park with supporting brickwork.

From the medieval period, and possibly earlier, water management was extensive as was found during excavations on the Merton Priory Site, however post-medieval industrial uses along the Wandle have removed much of the evidence of earlier uses.

There are numerous sites on the Greater London Sites and Monuments record relating to the area's early, medieval and later industrial history reflecting the areas importance in this regard.

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SURROUNDING AREA**

The Archaeological Priority Zones over which the conservation area extends extend beyond the conservation area boundaries. Many of these also have

alluvial archaeology, water-based industry (Wandle Valley Alluvium) and communication routes (Stane Street) as their themes.

Mainly outside the conservation area boundary are gravel terraces of the Wandle Valley. Recent archaeological work in Wandle Valley and elsewhere, especially on the West London Gravels around Heathrow, shows that parts, at least, of the gravel terraces were very important for settlement in prehistoric, Roman and, possibly Anglo-Saxon times.

Adjacent to the conservation area to the west along Merton High Street is the site of Horatio Nelson's former residence, Merton Place, which is designated as an Archaeological Priority Zone in its own right with post-Medieval Estates and Gardens as its theme. Immediately to the west of the conservation area along,

## RIVER WANDLE

The name of the Wandle is relatively modern and may have been derived from “Wandsworth”. In Roman times it is believed to have been much faster flowing and of greater volume than today. The area surrounding the river would probably have been quite swampy. The Anglo-Saxon name for the River was “hlida burna”, later corrupted to “hidebourne”.

The modern ~~course of the~~ River Wandle emerges as a small stream in the hills of North Surrey, from which it flows, running from Waddon ~~Pools~~ Ponds near Croydon in a northerly direction towards Wandsworth, where it joins the River Thames.

The river has played an important role in the historic development of the conservation area having from the earliest period of human settlement, been used as a source of water. The river has been central to the development of water-based industrial processes along its banks such as corn milling, snuff manufacture and bleaching, printing and dyeing of calico cloth and has been used as a water supply from the earliest period of human settlement. It is known to have provided power for industrial processes such as corn milling for at least the last 1000 years. ~~Its~~ The total length of the Wandle, including both branches, is no more than about 25 11 miles, yet at the time of Domesday at least thirteen mills are recorded along its banks, a number of which were located within the modern boundaries of the London Borough of Merton. By 1610 this number had increased to twenty-four, and by the early nineteenth Century the total was forty. It is no surprise then that as the Industrial Revolution took hold in England, the River Wandle should become a focus for industries. It was close to London, a major market for goods and services. ~~In the 16th Century there were no fewer than 200 water wheels drawing power from the river.~~ From the 17th Century onwards there was an increasing diversification in mill function, including the working of copper, the grinding of dyestuffs, the manufacture of snuff and processing and finishing of calico cloth. Textile printing works were established by Huguenots, early in the eighteenth century, a tradition continued by William Morris and Arthur Liberty at Merton Abbey Mills and William Morris on a site downstream from there. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Mitcham was also known for its ‘physic gardens’ – the market gardening of medicinal herbs on the Wandle alluvium. There are 5 surviving water mills along the Wandle of which 3 are included on the Statutory List; the other 2 are on the local list.

Merton High Street, is the site of the Abbey Gate House that once stood within the outer precinct of the Abbey.

The archaeologically significant route of the Roman road "Stane Street" extends to the south-west and north-east of the conservation area in the Colliers Wood area.

Evidence of Bronze-Age ditches and an Iron-Age enclosure were excavated at the former Kings College Sports Ground off Western Road, to the east of the conservation area.

A Romano-British burial sites is are known to have existed to the east of the Conservation Area, in the vicinity of Haslemere Avenue and near Willow Lane, Mitcham to the south. A Roman well off Western Road, and where the archaeological evidence suggests the former presence of farmsteads or small village-type settlements (hamlets). There is also a strong probability of a Romano-British site, possible a *mansio*, in the Deer Park Road area although this has now been totally quarried away and backfilled.

Further to the west of the conservation area and Merton High Street is the Merton Village APZ centred on Kingston Road and extending over parts of Merton Park. This is believed to be the site of the medieval settlement that originated in the later Saxon Period.

North of the conservation area, in Mitcham's Upper Green is the meeting point of roads, which indicates that it has been a centre of settlement from early medieval times. is Mitcham Village where evidence points to unconnected Roman and possibly early Saxon Activity in the area.

To the west of the conservation area is the Morden Village archaeological priority zone centred in Central Road the site of a small scattered settlement of homesteads that stretched from the manorial centre of Morden Hall to St. Lawrence Church and George Hill throughout the medieval and post-medieval period.

To the south and east is Mitcham Common, an APZ based on a pre-historic landscape that takes in which embraces a swathe of former

heathland. Once far more extensive this overlies a gravel terrace on the eastern side of the Wandle Valley. Finds of Mesolithic and Neolithic flint tools, Bronze Age metalwork and stray Iron Age coins have been recovered from this area demonstrating the area's its significance for early settlement. However, the archaeological potential of this area has been reduced by extensive gravel extraction that took place across the Common, followed by the dumping of several metres of rubbish. The gravel terraces beyond the Common, along the east side of Beddington Lane were even more thoroughly removed by gravel digging and a large area to the west of Beddington was used as a sewage farm with deep-dug settlement tanks. Fragments of ancient land surface do however survive in the vicinity of Beddington Park, and odd patches used to survive elsewhere, most of which were archaeologically examined and removed.

Further north, close to the River Wandle in Wandsworth, an Iron Age settlement has been postulated between the River and Putney Bridge. A number of Iron Age sites have also been excavated

## **SAXON: ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY, MITCHAM**

Of archaeological significance is the early Saxon Cemetery located south of the Wandle in the vicinity of Morden Road. An account of the area recorded by a Benjamin Slater in 1911 refers to activities during 1848 the mid-19th Century. Morden Road was at this time Here what became the site of a floor cloth factory but it had previously been cultivated for liquorice, the roots of which extend for up to 3 - 4 ft deep requiring extensive digging to harvest them. This work resulted in large numbers of human bones and other artefacts being dug up including whole skeletons in stone coffins, at least one of which contained a sword. Because of the frequency that human bones were unearthed the site became known locally as "Dead Mans Close".

Other artefacts included silver and bronze coins, ranging in size from an old sixpence to a florin, spears and cups. The bones were allegedly stored in an old barn at Angel's Farm, on the site of the present day John's Place, Church Path, Mitcham and then re-buried after the harvest was completed. Many of the other artefacts were dispersed, with some workers taking items home or selling them to travelling dealers. A detailed archaeological investigation of the cemetery site, which extended either side of Morden Road, was carried out by Lieutenant Colonel H. F Bidder during 1925 and his findings are published.



## ROMAN: STANE STREET

The Roman Road 'Stane Street' is believed to have been constructed by Roman military engineers between AD 50 - AD 70 to link Chichester, on the Sussex coast, with London (Londinium) via London Bridge. The modern A24 (London Road, Morden, and Colliers Wood High Street) crossing the Borough from south-west to north-east roughly follows the alignment of its route. Although not the only communication link at the time, the Roman road probably influenced contemporary and subsequent patterns of development in the area until the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the expansion of rail communications produced a major growth in suburban housing development across the entire Borough.

The route of the braided Wandle during Roman times is far from clear today, nor is the precise route of 'Stane Street' across the Wandle Valley. The area was predominantly marshy and there are conflicting views as to whether the road diverted to avoid it or ran straight through. It does appear to have taken a more direct route across the Wandle than the present A24 (which runs to the north through Merton).

Similarly it is not clear where the road crossed the River Wandle. Evidence of Roman bricks used in the construction of old Merton Bridge, is recorded in a report by a 19th century surveyor and a description dating from 1817 referring to an arch "turned with tiles, instead of brick or stone" suggests this bridge may have incorporated Roman materials. The bridge was probably maintained by Merton Priory, as was customary in the middle ages, and fell into disrepair after the dissolution of the Priory in the 16th century. The bridge definitely still survived in 1569 and but was described in 1572 as being "very greatly in decay", it was probably re-built soon after, although it is not clear whether this was in same location. There is a reference to a bridge being 'erected' in 1633. This was a narrow single-track bridge and a separate timber pedestrian bridge, with handrail, was added alongside. These This bridges survived until the present bridge on Merton High Street was built to replace it in the late 19th or early 20th century.

The construction of the Roman road provided a spur to settlement, and roadside habitation has been suggested in the area of the Merton Industrial Estate, to the west of the river, where evidence of a roman settlement, including coins and some building materials were excavated in 1922. The building of Merton Priory on a site close to where Stane Street crossed the river Wandle may have also provided a focus for settlement. Virtually all the major monasteries attracted substantial secular settlement to their gates and Merton Priory, which was frequented by the Crown and baronage is unlikely to have been an exception. Evidence for the road and potentially a roadside settlement survive. It could potentially have been the largest medieval population centre in the Borough.

Part of the road beside High Street, Colliers Wood was excavated archaeologically in 1997, confirming its alignment. The road continued to exert an influence on communication after the end of the Roman period (evidenced by its adoption as the main road from the medieval period onwards).

The constraints presented by the establishment of Merton Priory in the 12th Century, and the development of Merton Village to the west may help explain the possible diversion of the medieval and modern road from Stane Street's possible assumed original alignment across this part of the Wandle Valley.

close to the River to the south of the Borough within Sutton.

## ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

The origins and development of the conservation area are entwined with the River Wandle on which the designation of the area is based, and which has been a focus for settlement and industry from the before the Roman period.

The relatively fertile alluvial deposits of the Wandle Valley appear to have proved attractive for early settlement. Other influences include the route of the Roman Road linking Chichester with London Bridge, 'Stane Street', the major religious centre at Merton Priory, and the Surrey Iron Railway. More recently, the development of the modern railways has also had an impact on the development of the area in terms of the increased suburbanisation that they provoked.

Organic Peat deposits in the Windsor Avenue area provide some evidence of the general environment of the area during the early prehistoric post-glacial period suggesting it was predominantly marshy around 10,000-4,500 BC.

Regionally the period from the later Iron Age onwards saw the growth of settlement. However, within the proximity of the Wandle Valley conservation area, activity in the late-Bronze Age and Iron Age periods is represented by only a few stray archaeological finds such as flint tools and pottery found in association with agricultural features, such as for example enclosing ditches.

The construction of 'Stane Street', and Evidence of roadside habitation in dating from the Roman period has been suggested to the west of the Wandle in the area of the modern Morden Road/Deer Park Road Industrial Estate. Excavations in the Merton Priory area revealed a Roman ditch and occasional

artefacts, but the actual location of the settlement is unclear.

There is little direct evidence of Saxon settlement within the area. However, a number of burials excavated close to the junction of Mill Road and Merton High Street, immediately to the west of the conservation area are thought to be of Saxon date. The early Saxon cemetery excavated in Mitcham, just to the south of the Wandle, provides good evidence for a settlement in the vicinity during the immediately post-Roman period. The settlements of Merton, and Morden, immediately to the west of the conservation area probably have late Saxon origins. Archaeological excavations, immediately to the east of the conservation area in Tramway Path, by the Museum of London Archaeology Service in 1997 also revealed evidence of an early to mid Saxon, sunken featured building. This is the first physical evidence of Saxon occupation on the eastern side of London Road.

The Medieval period showed the foundation of Merton Priory, during the 12th Century, close to the Wandle and





*Rocque's Map 1741-45*

its crossing by the Roman Road, Stane Street, which was to develop as a significant religious centre. The priory was dissolved and the buildings demolished during the 16th Century. Excavations north-east of the conservation area in between Mitcham parish church and the Lower Green have revealed evidence of medieval settlement, including a 14th Century moated Manor hall house and chapel on the former site of Mitcham Hall dating from the 14th century.

During the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries areas of land around the Wandle were gradually acquired for the estates of large houses. A few of these houses survive, including Morden Hall, which is located within the conservation area. The former grounds of some of these houses survive to this day as Wandle Park, Morden Hall Park and Ravensbury Park.

The area to the north of Wandle Park between the main conservation area and Copper Mill Lane was the site of old water meadows on the banks of the Wandle. The area was more recently the site of the Wandle Valley Sewage Works, which were laid out in 1877. The sewage works closed in 1971 and the southern part of the derelict site has been transformed into the new Wandle Meadow Nature Park.

### Review of Historic Maps

The pattern of development since the mid-18th Century is discernible from the succession of old maps.

The earliest maps show the River Wandle flowing through predominantly open farmland. **Rocque's map** of 1741-5 shows a number of mills along the course of the river, including a copper mill, "Garrett's", at Copper Mill Lane, a corn mill at Wandle Bank, a copper mill at Merton High Street, and mills at Merton Abbey, Morden Hall Park, Ravensbury and Mitcham. The principle



*Cary's Map 1817*

roads, established by the time of John Rocque's map, included the predecessor of Plough Lane which ran to the north of the modern Plough Lane through the copper works, Colliers Wood/Merton High Streets, the predecessor to Christchurch Road, Merton/Morden Roads, Benedict Road (which originally continued through to link Church Road and Morden Road) and London Road, Mitcham. This map also shows what remained at this time of

the Merton Priory Complex. Surviving buildings within the complex include a gatehouse fronting the adjacent roads main road to London.

**Milne's Map** of 1800 shows the village centre at a concentration of dwellings and other buildings around Merton Bridge, established in the vicinity of the present-day Colliers Wood House is marked and Wandle Bank is shown can be seen leading up to the corn mill, and A

## SURREY IRON RAILWAY

In 1801 Parliament passed an Act authorising the Surrey Iron Railway Company to build a nine-mile (15km) line between Croydon and the River Thames at Wandsworth. The line followed closely the River Wandle in order to serve some of the many factories that had been built along its banks. The owners of these factories were strong supporters of the decision to build the railway.

William Jessop, born in Devonport in 1745, was appointed chief engineer of the project. He became a pupil of John Smeaton at the age of 16 and worked with him on canals in Yorkshire. In 1790 Jessop was a partner in the Butterley Iron Works and began to manufacture fish-bellied cast-iron rails, which marked an important advance in railway technology. By the late 1790s Jessop was recognised as one of Britain's leading engineers. As well as the Surrey Iron Railway he was involved in a great number of other projects including the Grand Junction Canal, the Bristol Docks and the West India Docks on the Thames in London. William Jessop died in 1814.

The line was opened on 26th July, 1803 and was the world's first horse drawn railway for public transport which was independent of a canal. The railway was fairly level and a horse could pull five or six loaded wagons carrying over 20 tons of coal at just under 3 mph. From its basin at Wandsworth, near the mouth of the river, it followed much of the route of the river, through Mitcham to finish at Croydon and Hackbridge. The line was initially a great success and the company successfully obtained a further Act of Parliament that gave permission to extend the line southwards to Godstone. This extension was opened in 1805 but was only ran as far as Merstham and was mainly used to transport material from the quarries in the neighbourhood to the River Thames where goods were loaded on to barges for transport into London.

The original intention had been to extend the line south to Portsmouth but the company ran out of money and the idea was abandoned. Because it was merely a horse-powered plate way with flanged rails the arrival of the steam locomotive and modern railways meant it began falling into disuse and by the end of the 1840s it was all but abandoned. The extension probably closed in 1842 and the remainder by 1848. The great suburban railway networks of the London and South-Western Railway and the London Brighton and the South Coast Railway had passed by the route.



**Ordnance Survey Map - 1865**

number of narrow plots are shown laid out at the southern end of Wandle Bank east of the bridge may be survivals of a medieval field system. **Cary's map of 1817** shows little change from Milne's map, although apart from the route of the Surrey Iron Railway is shown running to the east of, and parallel to, the river.

The **Ordnance Survey maps of 1865 and 1870** show increased development in the South Wimbledon/Merton area and also around Colliers Wood along the High Street, and Merton High Street. A number of large houses set in spacious grounds, however, still survived along Merton High Street at this time. The Single Gate tollgate is shown located at the junction of Christchurch Road and Colliers Wood High Street. The cottages at the southern end of Wandle Bank are also shown.

The 1865 Ordnance Survey map also shows the Brighton and South Coast Railway, Streatham to Wimbledon Branch with Merton Abbey Station located on the site of Merton Priory. Further south the 1865 map shows further industrial development including a japan and varnish works and a bleach works in the Phipps Bridge area, and also to the north of Ravensbury Park, including the Ravensbury Print Works sited to the east of Ravensbury Mill. Riverside industry in Mitcham at this time included flour milling and felt manufacture at the Grove Mill site and two more mills, Mitcham Mill (a flour mill) and a "Logwood" mill (flour) grinding dyestuffs on stood either side of the river to the south of the modern Willow Lane industrial estate. A number of large houses and estates have had emerged in Mitcham along London Road by this time, including Ravensbury Park House, to the south of the Wandle, Grove House with its grounds extending over the present Ravensbury Park Watermeads Housing Estate, and Wandle Grove to the east of London Road. Further south and east are were areas of watercress beds.

This Map also shows the Wimbledon to Croydon Branch of the Brighton and South Coast Railway, Mitcham Station and the Surrey Brewery to the south of the railway.



**Ordnance Survey Map - 1865**

The 1910 Ordnance Survey map shows further residential development including another terrace of cottages in Wandle Bank.

A comparison between the 1865 and the 1935 Ordnance Survey maps shows the pace of development that followed the introduction of the railways in areas surrounding the conservation area. However for the most part the conservation area itself escaped major development pressure with several of the large houses within the area surviving until well into the 1930s.

The 1935 Ordnance Survey map shows that ~~many of~~ the larger houses along Merton High Street and within the Colliers Wood area had been demolished and their grounds parcelled up for new streets of terraced housing. The larger private estates of Morden Hall and Mitcham Grove House, however do survive and eventually passed into public ownership, and in the case of Morden Hall to the National Trust, and are preserved as suburban parks forming the chain of green spaces that run the length of the Wandle retaining the more open feel reminiscent of the original estates. Wandle Park, the

## OTHER RAILWAYS IN THE AREA

Despite all the mills in the valley, the area around the Wandle Valley remained predominantly rural, except for the small village of Mitcham to the north of the River. The history of Mitcham goes back to before Domesday; and although very close to London (the 18th century milestone on Figges Marsh quotes 9 miles), Mitcham was poorly served by the growth of railways. Primarily this was because the town was roughly equidistant between the two major southern routes out of London, the London and South-Western Railway mainline from Waterloo to Southampton and the London, Brighton and the South Coast Railway mainline from London Bridge to Brighton. The Surrey Iron Railway declined in use in the 1830s and the suburban sprawl needed to support a railway network was still decades away.

In 1855 a single-track branch line was opened linking Wimbledon to Croydon, through Mitcham Station on London Road just north of the Wandle. The line roughly followed the track bed of the Surrey Iron Railway. At the time of its building, a Saxon burial site was discovered, the remains of which are in the British Museum to this day. The whole length of the line at that time was rural by nature, and the line skirted the southern edge of the town of Mitcham. Indeed, right up to the day it closed, 31 May 1997, to make way for the new Croydon Tramlink the line continued to run through urban open spaces in the Merton-Morden area and across Mitcham Common. Although it benefited from electrification in 1931, it never really prospered, and in its closing years became the target of vandalism.

From 1906 Mitcham was served by the South Metropolitan Electric Tramways with trams running right through its centre from Croydon to Tooting and Wandsworth, with a spur line south to the Cricket Green to the north of the railway station. But these tramways fell to first the trolleybuses of the 1930s, and which then in turn fell to the diesel buses of the 1950s. The year 2000, however saw the re-introduction of a modern light rail/tram service linking Croydon to Wimbledon along the route of the former Wimbledon to West Croydon Line.

former grounds to Wandlebank House also escaped the encroaching development and survives to this day as a public park.

Therefore, the pattern of streets today represents a build up of layers over an underlying framework of medieval roads field boundaries and tracks. New centres for industry, trade and shopping can be seen to have developed along these historic routes dispersed between surviving larger house plots and nuclei of riverside industries. As the former housing plots were developed new roads were introduced linking into the original historic infrastructure. Gradually as all the larger plots are developed the commercial centres merged into each other to form more continuous commercial frontages with extensive hinterlands of residential streets.

The main historic elements that survive, therefore, include historic road routes that underlie the modern road framework, surviving mills and industrial buildings, surviving large houses and grounds, remnants of old estates and the River Wandle itself. The main historic features are described in more detail below.

## **ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURROUNDING AREA**

Areas beyond the conservation area were predominantly agrarian with settlement growth characterised by the development of scattered settlements, within a broader agricultural landscape from the Roman period ~~and from late Saxon times~~ onwards. This produced a network of medieval homesteads and village nuclei across the Borough now largely hidden after processes of suburbanisation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It was not until the introduction of the railways that significant change occurred as large areas around London were gradually suburbanised. Main

phases of development around the conservation area include an area of dense residential development, named "New Wimbledon" to the west of the conservation area shown laid out between Haydon's Road (formerly Haydon's Lane) and the River Wandle on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1865 and 1870. North Road, South Road and East Road are shown laid out and the area divided up into narrow plots on which a number of tightly knit terraces of cottages had begun to be erected. There were also a couple of public houses, a school and Sunday school and by 1890 the recreation ground on the western side of Haydon's Road had been established, complete with a bandstand.

The 1890 Ordnance Survey map shows further residential development mainly in the Colliers Wood, Wimbledon areas and around Tooting to the north and east. A number of new roads are shown laid out between Haydon's Road and the Wandle north of Merton High Street.

The 1935 Ordnance Survey map does however show the St. Helier Estate, a major inter-war GLC LLC (London County Council) housing development established to the south of the conservation area. Areas to the east and west of the conservation area, particularly north of Morden Hall Park, are also shown as being more intensively developed by this time, mainly for housing, in the form of new streets of terraced housing typical of late-Victorian and Edwardian London.