

Heritage Walk: The Causeway to Feathers Wharf

This is a short and easy walk (scarcely more than a mile and a half). Even at a slow pace with stops to read the notes, it should take no more than an hour at most, including the walk back to the starting point. You might want to extend your walk by an alternative route back to the town centre (see 31).

Introduction to The Walk

2. The starting point is **The Armoury** pub (erstwhile The Crane) on Armoury Way (easy to find on any street map). This is one of Wandsworth's earliest pubs (c. 1742). It was largely rebuilt in the 1920s but some original features remain inside. Its name is thought to come from the many cranes working from the wharves in Bell Lane Creek. (Good pub with small garden.)

3. Here you are standing in what would have been the centre, more or less, of the original settlement that became Wandsworth. An ideal spot for a settlement: fast-flowing trout river providing fresh clean water and food. A marshy delta area between here and the Thames, with many inlets from the Thames, providing wildfowl and willows (osiers) for basket work and fencing (recalled in the names of Osiers Road and Osiers Estate).

4. It was not then called Wandsworth, nor was the river called the Wandle. The river was the **Hlidaburna** (or Hlidaburnan, a noisy stream). There is archaeological evidence of people living here as far back as the Bronze and Iron Ages, but we know little about them. There is a reference to an early Saxon settlement of **Wendels** in 693, called **Wendels Wurthe**, and a Roman reference to the river as the **Vandalis**. Clearly the Wendels gave the present name to the river although 'Wandle' is not recorded until around 1600.

Importance of the river

5. Because of its fast and powerful flow, there were from Roman and Saxon times **water mills** along the length of the river (Domesday mentions 13 (but some sources say 20) and eventually there were at least 68 (some sources say many more). The early mills were corn mills and from at least the 16th century the Wandle corn mills provided most of the flour for London. In 1610 it was proposed that water from the Wandle be drawn off to supply the City but this would have reduced power to the corn mills and the importance to London of flour prevented this from happening.

The 3 big Wandsworth Corn Mills

6. The **Upper Mill** was at the south end of Wandsworth's Southside shopping centre. The main mill was largely destroyed by fire in 1928, but a mill building over the bypass channel was not demolished until 1962.

7. The **Middle Mill** straddled the river between the start of The Causeway and Armoury Way. It was originally a wood dye mill which made a brown dye from brazil wood (hence its common name the **Brazil Mill**) but it was (c.1600) converted into a flour mill and later (1750) had a windmill attached to supplement its power. It closed in 1893.

8. The **Lower Mill**, sometimes called **Causeway Mill**, was at the mouth of the Wandle. It began as a corn mill, later converted to an oil mill, then one for grinding malt for Watney's Battersea distillery and finally was turned back to a corn mill by Daniel Watney (of the brewing family). Demolished in 1898.

Industrial Period

9. In the **17th/18th centuries** the area became **heavily industrialised** because of the source of power from the Wandle river (**considered the greatest source of usable water power in London**). Mill industries included iron, copper, gunpowder, oil, leather, paper, textiles, flock, and fulling, as well as continuing flour production. So began the Wandle's serious **pollution** from industrial waste and sewage.

10. **The walk starts** with a look at **Dormay Street**, immediately to the east of the Armoury pub. Previously called **Bell Lane**, it leads to **Bell Lane Creek** (which we shall see from The Causeway) but also to **Dormay Wharf** alongside the Creek. Dormay was a coal merchant who created a small gas works that supplied heat and light to nearby companies and houses.

11. The Wharf also housed **Burroughs and Welcome's** first factory. In Dormay Street (Bell Lane) was the engineering works of **James Wentworth** which made the beam engines at the Ram brewery. The listed **Wentworth House** (on your right, just after the junction with Armoury Way) was the home of the Wentworth family. It is a hidden Wandsworth gem, but in structural danger from the activities of Thames Water, which has bought the Keltbray site and other land nearby for Thames Tunnel workings. Dormay Street will be used for access by heavy lorries.

12. The English Heritage Grade II listing for Wentworth House records: *...forecourt wall, gate and gate piers. Early 18th Century. Two storeys, 5 windows, with one window later extension. Brown brick. Red brick band first floor. New slate roof. Flat door hood on richly-carved brackets. Original wood eaves cornice (remodelled). Red gauged flat arches and dressings to flush framed windows. Staircase with thick turned balusters, wide handrail, square newels and panelling. Panelling and wood cornice in ground floor area. Later wrought iron gate and stone capped piers to ramped forecourt wall.*

13. **Walk back to Armoury Way** and turn down **The Causeway**

14. Originally, the Causeway is most likely to have been just a raised pathway across marshy land. It became the pathway to the Lower Mill and also led into **Church Walk** (now route of Smugglers Way), which led to All Saints church (High Street) from the 'Waterside community' (now Riverside West). As recorded in the 1560s, the skew **bridge**, where The Causeway crossed the Wandle on its way to the lower mill and beyond, was required to be widened to at least 4 feet.

15. The Causeway path is privately owned, in recent times by the Central Electricity Generating Board / National Power/ EDF Energy. In 2006 the right

of way over part of the path, from The Plain to the Railway arches, was sold to a private firm and this has had some unfortunate consequences (see below).

Bell Lane Creek

16. From the bridge you can see the Creek branching away from the river and the area of the wharves noted when in Dormay Street. The river and creek are **tidal** here: in the heavy industrial period the basin was full of barges and boats and cranes. Looking due west, at the point where the creek bends, was a large inlet. There were also several small dock inlets, all now filled in.

17. Behind us is the demonstration 'alternative energy' **turbine**, built by Renue. It generates a small amount of electricity by using tidal flows, lighting a room in the nearby school.

18. The land between the creek and the river is called **Causeway Island**. (The whole island is the land both sides of the railway arches, but only the part south of the arches is called Causeway Island.) Like much of the Wandle Delta, it once grew willows (there was a thriving osiers industry in the delta): later it was a coal storage area for railways. It was acquired by Wandsworth Borough Council (WBC) from British Rail in 1986, specifically for recreational and river-related activities, and the council negotiated vehicle access rights to the Island from London Electricity (the easement expires in 2085).

19. There had been plans for a boatyard to be established on the Island, but in 1988 WBC withdrew from the boatyard project. However, the site was still earmarked for boating or river-related use. To this end in 1990 a half-tide weir at the mouth of the Wandle was built to impound water in the basin (unloved by the Environment Agency and recently removed). Currently, the Island is used as a depot for WBC cleaning services.

20. Although the Causeway is a private road, WBC in 1986 paid (£106 and regeneration fund money) for improvements – lighting; viaduct cleaned; bridges painted; paving at the northern end; new railings and lifebelts. There are also WBC-installed CCTV cameras. In 1996 National Power realigned and re-opened the pedestrian skew bridge across the Wandle (closed since 1984).

21. On The Causeway, opposite Causeway Island, is a small area of open land. Permission from London Electricity was sought by environmental groups (including Wands Soc) for its use as an ecological area. This was agreed to by London Electricity but did not materialise. Subsequently, WBC got permission to make a little garden. It put railings alongside the river, made a wooden pathway, planted trees and plants and, notably, some steps down to the river for canoeists to exit before reaching the Thames.

22. All this was trashed by the new owners of The Causeway, which was then advertised as an area for storage containers, but planning permission was refused. It remains derelict, but with natural growth re-establishing itself.

23. The Causeway itself had been freely used by cars when canoeing activities were taking place, but all this is now prohibited. Frequent notices

along the way announce it to be a private road. However, it has been established that it is a Pedestrian Right of Way and part of the Thames Path.

24. **Causeway Bridge** was built as part of the Government- funded Wandsworth Challenge Partnership regeneration scheme. This included the improvements to **The Spit** and ecological improvements to the riverbanks.

25. **Carry on round The Causeway as far as Feathers Wharf**

26. On the far side of the wharf there used to be a **canal** with a large dock (near Southside) capable of holding up to 30 barges. The dock linked with the **Surrey Iron Railway** (built 1802/3) that took goods as far as Croydon – the first public railway in the world, run by the first railway company in the world! The canal was filled in c.1930 by the Wandsworth Gas Works Company.

27. On the canal side of Feather's Wharf was **The Feathers Boathouse**, a Young's and Bainbridge pub with a boat- building yard attached. The wharf was once also used for coal storage and housed a boys' Institute. It is in fact two wharves, Feathers and Institute. Feathers is on the Thames frontage with a slither of land running alongside the Waste Transfer Station (WTS). Institute Wharf lies alongside the Wandle.

28. By a legal quirk, although the site could have been owned by the Greater London Council for waste purposes, ownership is divided between WBC (Feathers) and the Wandsworth Riverside Waste Authority (Institute).

29. When the WTS was built in 1983 the GLC was persuaded not to build on any of the wharf but to leave it as a **2-acre public open space** by the Wandle, with riverside paths and access to both rivers for boating activities. Responsibility for developing the little 2-acre park eventually fell to WBC but it has reneged on its duty and ear-marked the site for development, reducing the requirement placed on a developer to just the riverside walks. There is growing pressure for WBC to implement (or allow to be implemented) the walks now, not to wait for a developer to come along (note that the area for the walks is already fenced off).

30. There is an **overhead walkway** through the WTS, intended to link the Thames Path on both sides of the building. Leading to nowhere because of Feather's Wharf, it has not yet been opened. Look beyond the WTS to the Riverside West Flats, and across Smugglers Way to B&Q and Homebase: this was the enormous site of the Wandsworth Gas Works (which took over Mr Dormay's small gas works).

31. **Go back to Causeway bridge.** Crossing the bridge you can walk along the temporary riverside path to the Thames. (A permanent path will be established when the building of Riverside Quarter – on the old Shell site – is complete. When you reach the Thames, rather than retracing your steps to Armoury Way, you might prefer to walk west to explore the new residential developments and Point Pleasant – interesting architecture, Thames views, restaurants etc. It should not be hard to find your way back to the town centre.