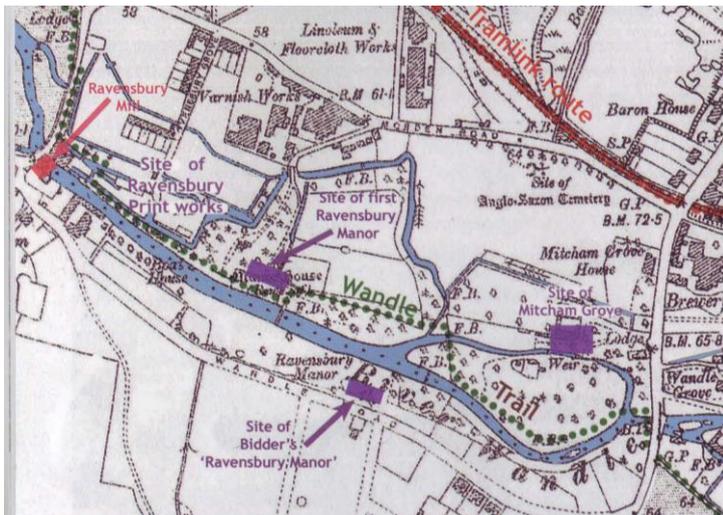


RAVENSBURY PARK TRAIL

Start at the side of Ravensbury Mill

Stop 1.

The grassy area beside the river is the site of an early 19th century house where the mill manager lived. The river was diverted in 1962, and this rather spoiled the garden and surroundings. The Council demolished the building soon afterwards. This created the pleasant open area we see nowadays.



Ravensbury Mill 1919

Mills were situated on both sides of the river. Logwood milling, for extracting different colour dyes, and the grinding of tobacco leaves for production of snuff. On the Mitcham side of the river, in Ravensbury Mill, a Mr. Rutter produced snuff, and tobacco for pipes, from 1806 until about 1925. (Rutter Gardens is named after him and is located nearby). Later, Whiteley Products occupied the building and produced all kinds of sporting equipment from skipping ropes to starting gates for horse races. Their products included parachute cords, chest expanders, straps and cords of all kinds, and the very strong elasticated rope used on aircraft carriers to help returning aircraft land onto the decks safely. The Company left the site in the mid 1980s. This grade 2 listed building still has two water wheels, but they are not in their original working order, and the building has been mostly converted into flats and houses. When Whitely Products were there, the wheels were turned occasionally to clear debris from the water.

Proceed along the Wandle Trail until you find a sign saying "Deep Water".

Stop 2.

Here is the site of early textile printing industry in the area which flourished from the late 17th century until the 1860s. The main factory was on the Mitcham bank of the river. Ruins of the old print works were cleared by WW2 prisoners of war, mostly from Italy and Austria. The land was later purchased by the council to build houses.

The River Wandle

In a painting of about 1800, a mill pond is near where the mill buildings were built in 1804. When water was needed to turn the water wheels, sluices were opened and water from the pond would rush in and all the machinery inside the mill would start working. Water flowed under the building, turning the wheels, then went under the road, and continued through the park. After the Council had put up some houses in Morden Road, some of the overflow from the mill pond used to flow in front of them before disappearing under the road. The water was diverted in the 1960s as it was thought to be a flood risk. Today the river no longer flows under the mill, but to the side.

Stop 3. Entrance to Ravensbury Grove Housing Estate

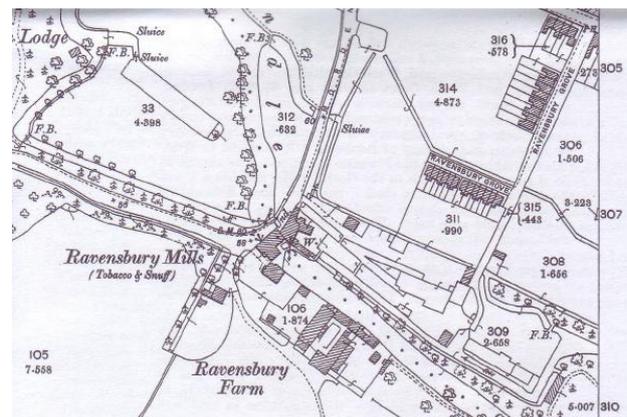
The site of the Ravensbury Calico Print Works is under the lock-up garages and flats to the left.

The print works were run by the Mauvillains, a Huguenot family from about 1690 to about 1740. After them, there was a series of other families who continued with the same industry.

Where were the Huguenots from?

In order to have the best results, the cotton cloth known as calico, had first to be bleached in the sunlight to make it as clean and as clear of blemishes as possible. The grounds used for the bleaching process lay behind the factory building and extended as far as Morden Road. All that remains of the works today is a length of red brick wall and a backwater of the Wandle.

Can you see the red brick wall which is all that remains of the old factory?



On the opposite bank of the river, to the right of the park entrance, was Ravensbury Farm (see the above map from 1894). There used to be a large complex of buildings here. There was also Ravensbury Barn, an old weatherboard slate-roofed building which stood next to the farm. This was demolished in the 1950s to provide a site for flats.

Proceed to the ruins of old Ravensbury House (behind a chain-link fence)

Stop 4.

The old house that stood here was once known as Ravensbury Manor House, and was purchased in 1531 by Sir Nicholas Carew. It later became the home of a Navy officer, Admiral Arbuthnot in 1780. By 1865 only ruins could be seen. The old road from Mitcham to Morden, known as Ravensbury Lane, crossed the river here, but was later diverted. The line of the old road can be seen at the cul de sac which leads from Morden Road to the park gates, it then went through the park, past the toilets to the riverside.

Proceed to the Bridge in the park.

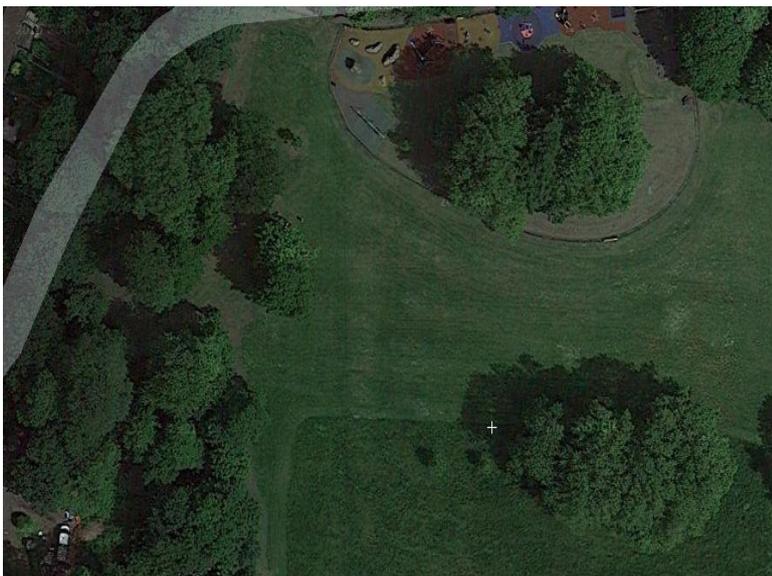
Stop 5.

The path on the far side of the river leads upstream to a gate to "Happy Valley" which is National Trust land and forms part of the Watermeads properties. It was given to the National Trust in 1915. On the site of "Park View" flats in Wandle Road and overlooking the park, was Ravensbury Manor. This beautiful old house failed to find a buyer when put up for sale in the 1930s, so it was demolished. Its stable block and outbuildings were converted into a house "The Gables" and survives as 2 Morton Road today.

Ravensbury Park comprises 16½ acres. 14 acres lie in Mitcham and the remainder in Merton. The two Councils that existed then agreed to buy it and to preserve the land for use as a public park in 1930.

There is evidence that parallel ditches once crossed the open grass land, suggesting that it was here that some of the bleaching grounds were sited.

Can you find where the bleaching grounds are thought to have been?



The cloth would have been spread out after washing, dried and bleached in the daylight before being printed and made ready for sale. Suitable dye for colour printing was produced not far away. The resulting printed calico was very popular and in high demand. It was considerably cheaper to produce than either silk or wool.

Proceed to the footbridge near the lake (opposite Watermeads Housing Estate)

Stop 6.

A River Wandle backwater and culvert was set aside on a new "Watermeads" housing estate in the 1970s to form a lake. This makes an attractive setting for the estate. The lake water level can rise as river water levels rise, thus reducing the threat of flooding.

Before being developed, most of the site was used as a cricket ground for the well known company "Hovis" and the northern part of the site was used by Locomotors Ltd, who repaired electric delivery vehicles such as milk floats. Excavations which took place in 1974 uncovered the foundations of Mitcham Grove which was a large house that had been demolished in 1846. Beneath these foundations, the remains of a large medieval house were found. The history trail for this medieval house goes back to 1564.

One memento of Mitcham Grove survives. From paintings of the house a cedar of Lebanon tree, which still exists today, can be seen on the lawn in front of the house.

Can you find the Cedar of Lebanon tree?

The site of an important Anglo Saxon burial ground lies to the north of the Watermeads Estate. Excavations which took place between 1888 and 1922 discovered over 200 graves with many more destroyed by farming activity. Both men and women were buried there. Some of the men were buried with weapons, and some of the women had jewellery. Some late Roman remains were also found.

Interesting Facts about the River Wandle

- Waddon to the Thames, the Main river:
Length of the river = 26.72 km (16 miles)
- Fall (the highest start point to the lowest finish point):
111 Feet over the river's course
- Roughly, this equates to approximately a fall of nearly 7 feet per mile, making the River Wandle a fast flowing river - ideal for turning water wheels. Thirty eight water wheels had the potential power of 781 combined horse power. No wonder it was a busy river!

What does 'horse power' mean?