

OFFICIAL CROYDON

Officialdom comes in many forms. While the Church dominated activities in Croydon for centuries, that doesn't mean to say that our landscape and activities haven't also been shaped by other authorities. Some traditions started as religious but turned secular, such as the ceremony of beating the bounds, while others were secular from the start.

We also take a look at recent official activities, concentrating on what the elected body that we lovingly call the Council gets up to. And our slingshot isn't aimed at Croydon councillors alone!



Town hall with Queen's Gardens, soon to be transformed

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MARKING OUR TERRITORY

Boundaries and tracks have something in common: they mark out features on the landscape, whether demarcating where one man's property ends and the neighbour's starts or showing the early traveller which way to go. A strategically placed marker can cause or solve disputes, but when they are rediscovered centuries later they can give rise to legends.

BEATING THE BOUNDS

Processions, often described as 'bacchanals' by their opponents, were once held for the blessing of crops grown in the parish. The secular purpose of beating the parish boundaries was originally of secondary importance. In Saxon times they were called Ganging Days. They took place at Rogationtide in the fifth week after Easter, just before Ascension Day. The custom became a sober affair after the Reformation, with psalms and homilies. However, neighbouring parishes would jealously guard their territory, and this occasionally led to disputes and court cases. One particular case even involved Elizabeth I and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The wider availability of maps largely put paid to the custom, but some English parishes have reintroduced it, encouraged by local history enthusiasts and the Open Spaces Society.

On Rogation Sunday, 21 May 1995, a section of Croydon's bounds was beaten again for the first time in many years. The event was promoted by the Friends of South Norwood Country Park and marked new territory in the park that had recently been handed over by the adjoining London Borough of Bromley.

Croydon's parish boundaries used to be walked every few years, with the Vicar of Croydon leading the procession. The

time taken grew as the parish became larger. Eventually the perambulation was conducted every few years by borough officials in cars, and then it lapsed entirely.

A great deal of ceremony used to be involved, with participants carrying church banners. At certain points on the route a stop would be made while the Vicar read a passage from the Bible. As described in Paget's *By-ways in the History of Croydon*, boys were beaten gently with switches (a slender shoot cut from a tree) or 'bounced' on the post so that they would remember the positions of the boundary markers. By way of compensation for the discomfort they were given 'points', which were tagged laces used in place of buttons for fastening clothing.

1876 saw the first ceremony for 12 years. Churchwardens and overseers made up the party, led by a man with the ordnance and tithe maps. Twelve boys from the Whitgift School were given sticks to beat the boundaries and a man called Jackson was hired to wade streams and climb walls and hedges. The 30-strong team went by train to Caterham Junction, and thence to the starting point at Psalm's Oak near Foxley Hatch. At the previous ceremony a rector had been bounced on an oak, but that had since been replaced by a post, which was beaten enthusiastically by the boys. Jackson waded the Wandle at Beddington and the boys

were lifted over various walls. In Shirley on the second day they invaded a man's property and upset him so much that he went to fetch a hatchet. Even with the aid of maps there were disputes with Beckenham over a piece of land belonging to Croydon and also near Foxley Hatch, where the neighbouring parish had enclosed part of the boundary near Brighton Road. Remains of ancient fences showed that the land belonged to Croydon, but the ordnance map was shown to be at fault in not showing where the old boundary lay.

A booklet produced for the 1901 ceremony explained that pagan Rome had a festival on 23 February called Terminalia, in honour of Terminus. There was also the annual festival of Ambarvalia (meaning 'to go round the field'), which was held on three days in May with the object of obtaining a favourable harvest. Animals were led round the fields and then sacrificed while the peasants sang hymns to Ceres. The book's author went on to explain that 'in times of Popery [they were] accompanied with great abuses, - feasting and superstition being performed with them', and that 'It is recorded that in 1570, the Roman Catholics in Rogation Week had their "Gospelles at superstitious Crosses, deck'd like idols"'.

Public processions were discontinued at the Reformation - only the 'useful and harmless part' was retained in what then became a perambulation of the parish bounds. No set prayers were laid down for Rogation Day, but Elizabeth I required the rector, vicar or curate and important local men to walk about the parish. At certain places the curate had to admonish the people to give thanks to God for the harvest, and they sang psalms.

The 1901 booklet also includes a map of the route with instructions for what should happen at each point. This included the presentation of an oak snuff box made by Lambeth Council from the post that used to mark the spot where the Vicar's Oak stood in Upper Norwood. An 1898 photo shows a lamppost marking this spot. The oak had been felled in 1678 (or not until after 1825, according to J B Wilson in *The Story of Norwood*) and replaced by a post, which stood there for over 120 years.

A special, and highly untraditional, ceremony was arranged in 1928 when Addington became part of the Borough of Croydon. Whereas around 10 miles a day had been covered on previous occasions, the use of cars made it possible to cover the whole 40 miles in just one day. This is believed to have been a national innovation. By that time the ceremony was almost entirely secular, led by the mayor, with the town clerk, aldermen, councillors and about a dozen schoolboys making up the party. The boys carried willow switches to beat the boundary markers. A photograph in the *Croydon Advertiser* of 19 May 1928 shows a boy being 'bounced' on a boundary stone by Mr Carter, the Borough Engineer.

The 1928 ceremony avoided the traditional scaling of walls and wading of streams, once felt necessary if the exact boundary was to be remembered. Starting from the town hall, the convoy kept to an exact schedule. The cars sped from one site to the next 'in a manner calculated almost to raise some of the old parish worthies out of their graves'. The first stop was the border with Surrey and Kent where the boundary crossed from South Norwood

Farm to Monk's Orchard, and the boys reportedly beat the boundary 'enthusiastically'. As the weather deteriorated, some boundaries were just looked at from the shelter of the vehicles.

Following a break for lunch at the aerodrome, the party headed north to complete the circuit. The parishes of Croydon, Lambeth, Camberwell and Battersea met at a point now at the crossroads formed by Westow Hill, Anerley Road and Church Road. The Vicar's Oak, said to have grown large quantities of mistletoe, once stood here. The mistletoe was often cut and sold to London apothecaries. There was a tradition from the 16th and 17th centuries of serving bread and beer there while the party stopped for a rest. It is believed that crosses used to be cut into the bark by the parishioners beating the bounds. In 1928 a former vicar was bumped on the site of the former boundary oak.

Trees were perhaps not the best markers for boundaries, as they could be felled or mistaken. According to *The Great North Wood*, a serious dispute took place in 1500 on a seven acre coppice. A boundary tree, the Elder Oak, had been cut down years earlier so that the path marking the Croydon-Penge border was no longer clear. On at least three occasions the Vicar of Croydon had missed the route, despite being accompanied by parishioners and a written guide. The vicar was blamed for jeopardising the parish boundary, confessing to being afraid of a confrontation between his followers and men from Penge. He also said he didn't want to tear the 'decorative perambulation barriers' by passing through the coppice. A court case revealed that the elderly Croydon

parishioners had for years been taking an easy route around the coppice and had never challenged the Penge contingent, who took advantage of the rapidly growing coppices that overgrew the indistinct paths.

Although the date of 1500 given in the publication places this much earlier than the famous Rydon case below, some of the details in the accounts overlap. These include the coppice being awarded to Elizabeth Roydon [sic] and the parishioners following a written guide, which another source says was written half a century later on Cranmer's orders. Confusion reigns, too, in connection with an account written by Paget in *By-ways in the History of Croydon*. He names Richard Finch as the vicar, appointed in 1560, who took the wrong route and was stopped for trespassing. Sir Nicholas Heron of Addiscombe was accompanying the vicar and was held responsible, as he was disliked by the old men of the parish. After this the Archbishop gave Finch a guidebook, but he still had to trespass as the path near the Elder Oak was too overgrown. If this refers to Cranmer's guidebook, other sources say it was prepared in 1552, which predate's Finch's appointment! Maybe he was just handed a copy by another archbishop.

In 1552 the ceremony was a modest affair, but also potentially contentious. On 3 and 4 May the boundary was 'viewed at the commandment of the most reverend Father in God', i.e. walked on the order of Archbishop Cranmer. The procession involved two of Cranmer's servants, several 'ancient men', and some others. Although processions included old men from the parish who knew the route, disputes would still arise over ownership of land along the boundary. A guidebook

prepared for this occasion by order of the Archbishop is now held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Penge, on the north-eastern border of Croydon, was for much of its past a detached portion of the parish of Battersea. In 1577, despite the existence of Cranmer's guide, an action was brought against the Archbishop of Canterbury's men for trespass, arising from failed negotiations over the ownership of a coppice held by Elizabeth Rydon. The principals behind the parties were Queen Elizabeth I (for Mrs Rydon) and Archbishop Grindal (for Croydon). Croydon lost the case. The disputed land was awarded to Penge, although evidence dating back to 1399 indicated that this piece of land, given the name 'Regwood', belonged to the Archbishop. The court's judgment was disregarded by Croydon until an injunction was issued by the Court of the Exchequer to 'restrain parishioners from continuing to interrupt Elizabeth Rydon in her possession of certain woods'.



BOUNDARY MARKERS

While cast-iron or stone boundary markers remain, other less permanent ones, often trees, have long since vanished. These included the Vicar's Oak, commemorated by a plaque at Crystal Palace in 1988, and Psalm's Oak, Caterham.

A line of ancient yews still marks the border of Farthing Down, where the route along the eastern boundary is probably as old as the Celtic field system. The *Coulsdon Downs Nature Trails* book explains that yew had to be planted in every parish by Statute in the 12th century for making longbows. Because it was poisonous it was often planted in churchyards away from animals. On Farthing Down it seems a strange tree to plant in view of the local importance of sheep farming. The boundary between the lower fields and Farthing Downs, which belongs to the City of London rather than Croydon, is formed by a tree belt called, logically enough, the Farthing Downs Tree Belt. This is an ancient hedgerow with over 20 species of tree and shrub.

Thorn trees were also used as markers and sometimes had the name 'Beggar's Bush'. The word 'beggar' is believed to derive from the Saxon 'beaker', meaning a point. One such was Beggar or Beggar's Bush in Beddington, marking an ancient track on a chalky hill top. It stood on a parish boundary, and one or more human skeletons were found on the spot in 1862. Whose remains were they and why were they there? Answers by e-mail, please.

C W Johnson, writing in 1858, says that an old trackway passes south by Cold Harbour in Waddon. In his day it could be followed to Beggar's Bush near where it joins the Mear Bank, an ancient

ridge dividing Croydon and Beddington. He tells that the Saxons placed their mear or mark stones there to mark the boundary. Is this the same Beggar's Bush as where the skeletons were found just four years later?

In Purley, Beggar's Bush is the former name of Russell Hill. Back in the 1860s the name was changed due to snobbery when the Prince of Wales was invited to open the Drapers' Guild's new school. The actual bush is the clump of trees that in 1928 still stood outside the north fence of the school, It was planted in 1745 as a landmark to divide plough lands from sheep walks. A charter of King Edgar from 975 refers to this spot as Beggar's Thorn, so a previous tree must have existed. Other thorns elsewhere in Surrey marked the meeting place of the Hundred, a Saxon administrative body.

Other markers between properties include lynchets, which are banks marking the boundaries between fields. Well-preserved Celtic examples still exist at Farthing Down. Croydon has a number of mere (or mear) banks, this originally being a narrow bank lying in the open fields. The word occurs frequently in Anglo-Saxon charters to signify a 'boundary between two estates/towns'. The one at Woodside was called Long Mear. A bank and ditch running through a wood formed the boundary between Croydon and Addington in Shirley, as shown on the 1832 map of Oaks Farm, and three border posts stood near Badgers Hole. Addington did not become part of Croydon until 1928. The western edge of Biggin Wood in Norbury has an ancient bank and ditch marked with boundary pollards,

Break Neck Hollow in the Shirley Hills

follows the boundary bank between Shirley and Addington. An old boundary record held by person who acted as guide for the of the 1935 article in the *Croydon Advertiser* gives the name Dead Man's Stone to a place one furlong from the tumulus or mound on the south side of Coombe Lane. Quite how the two sites are related is not explained, but legend had it that a man was riding on horseback from the old smugglers' watering hole of the Lamb Inn over the hills and fell into the hollow. These hollow places used to be called devil's dykes and, although they looked very pretty with heather growing round them, they were gradually filling up with stones.

Croham Hurst has parish boundary markers dated 1888, 1894, 1901, 1920 and 1924, all erected by Croydon and all facing in the direction of the owning parish. The old track on the golf course is where three parish boundaries met, marked by at least 10 extant cast-iron markers. A 1928 parish marker in Littleheath Woods has a tree growing round it and may well soon be swallowed up entirely.

According to *Downland Rambles*, over in Whyteleafe there is an iron boundary post erected by the Corporation of the City of London in 1861 to mark the edge of the London Police District. Within this district tolls were payable on coal and wine brought into London. The tax was originally intended to pay for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666, but no one remembered to abolish it until 1889. Very convenient...

Back in central Croydon, the positions of the four medieval manorial boundary crosses marking out 100 acres of the old town were commemorated in 1977 by wall plaques. This was a Silver Jubilee project involving the local Rotary Clubs. In the 1930s crosses had been cut into the curb stones at the relevant sites by the County Borough. As stated on the plaques, the crosses marked the area within which the townsfolk 'enjoyed



Hurn/Hern cross plaque

Manorial Privileges'. Two of the original crosses are believed to have been positioned in elm trees, and all of them are believed to have disappeared in the late 1600s.

The Stay or Stake Cross was close to where the Woolwich now stands on the corner of George Street and Wellesley Road, and the original Whitgift School was built on the site. There is a commemorative plaque on the wall of

the Woolwich. The Crown Hill cross is now commemorated by a plaque on a wall nearly under the flyover at Pump Pail, near Old Town fire station. This wasn't its original name - that seems to have been forgotten. Berwick Sayers, writing in 1925, suggests it was near the Running Horse Inn in Old Town. The Hand Cross is commemorated on the wall of the Reeves furniture shop in Lower Church Street, and the Hern or Hurn Cross is commemorated by a plaque on the Blacksmiths Arms on the corner of Coombe Road and South End. The 1977 plaque on the Blacksmiths Arms was placed so high that two burly policeman had to lift the mayor up so that he could unveil it.

At one stage all of Croydon's inns stood in the area demarcated by the original crosses. These were originally the George, the Catherine Wheel, the Greyhound and the Three Tuns. Even as late as 1780 there were over 20 inns within the area and hardly any outside.

The privileges enjoyed by the inns would have included the right to issue trade tokens, used at a time of expanding trade and poor availability of small coinage. According to a source from 1883, the name 'Pump Pail' commemorates the district ('pale' being Norman English for 'district') whose residents had the privilege of access to water from the pump. The spring gushed up opposite the western end of Sheldon Street.

In June 1961 the ancient 'Hare Stone' was restored to its original site, which is now in the grounds of the independent Caterham School in Harestone Valley Road. For around sixty years it had stood within the grounds of Harestone, the house of a Mr W G Soper, but it was returned when the estate was broken

up. The restoration ceremony was attended by members of the school and citizens of Caterham. This massive boulder with a 16-foot circumference is believed to have been left by receding glaciation. It is said to weigh 2.5 stones (which doesn't seem very much for such a large lump of rock - maybe it should have read 'tons') and is believed to have marked the bounds of a long-forgotten property, not shown on the Rowed Map of 1736. That map does, however, include an illustration of the stone.

In the legend attached to this stone, it is said that a white hare could sometimes be seen sitting on top and a crock of gold was concealed beneath it. In the middle of the 19th century one Joe Atkins and his friends used crowbars to turn the stone over, but found no buried treasure. The hare connection probably derives from confusion with the term 'hoar stone', which used to mean a 'boundary stone'. Records from 1605 also refer to the stone as the 'Har Stone', 'har' meaning 'hoar' or 'grey'. There's a Harestone Down in Wiltshire with the remains of a stone circle, so the name was once widely used. 'Harestone' appears as an element in a number of local names in Caterham, including a branch of the Rotary Club, but I wonder what the locals make of the name. My only source for this story was a 1968 issue of *Local History Records*.

Boundaries are not only marked and beaten, but they may also be haunted. The wall of Carshalton Park is said to have a ghost. One report from 1880 says that 'a spirit [...] selected the outside of that barrier as the route for a periodical supernatural beat'. The wall is 2 miles long and is an ancient monument, but local opinion on its haunted status varies. Presumably the

1880 newspaper article refers to the wall around what is now St Philomena's school, rather than the part of the old Carshalton House estate that was turned into a public park. A local man I spoke to on a visit to the site in 1992 hadn't heard of the legend. Whatever happened to the 'guardians' popular in Earth Mysteries lore and psychic questing back in the day!

ANCIENT TRACKS

Some ancient routes across the countryside have been found to follow alignments of ancient sites, such as megaliths, holy wells and burial mounds. Such tracks were described by Alfred Watkins in *The Old Straight Track* in 1925. This seminal work sparked an interest in alignments called 'leys' or 'ley lines', which the New Age movement claimed as 'energy lines'. Lines linking 'centres of power' have been mapped all over the country, sometimes by dowsers using dowsing rods or pendulums out in the field, sometimes using maps and pendulums on the kitchen table ('map dowsing') or simply using a map and ruler. These alignments preferably pass through ancient and/or sacred sites, but in some cases the definitions have to be stretched a little. Nevertheless, the rule generally adhered to is that a ley line is a straight line connecting a minimum of three sites.

A triangular ley line, which is, therefore, a bit of a novelty, was mapped by author Chris Street, who published his findings in *Earthstars*, a book on the sacred geometry of London, after 12 years plotting lines on a London map. He alleged that the triangle connecting St Mary's in Addiscombe with St Mary's in Beddington and Pollards Hill in Norbury was the antithesis of the notorious Bermuda Triangle. It was part of an ancient ground plan radiating

peace and harmony to the surrounding countryside. Several newspapers picked up the story of the Croydon Triangle in 1991. The *Croydon Post* pointed out that the triangle included cemeteries, crematoria, the public mortuary, a sewage farm, a former isolation hospital, another hospital on the site of an old workhouse, the busiest roads in the borough, most of North End, 18 churches, a cinema and a large number of pubs. A journalist interviewed the local vicars: the Reverend Richardson of St Mary's in Beddington said he was aware of worship on the site for over 2000 years. However, he wasn't convinced that the site's geography had anything to do with it. The Reverend McKinney of St Mary's in Addiscombe speculated that his personal charisma might have something to do with it, and the Reverend Kirkwood of the Norbury Council of Churches didn't feel that Pollards Hill was 'more favourably inclined than anywhere else'.

While its position in a triangular ley is disputed, there's another interesting thing about St Mary's in Beddington: during a guided tour in 1992 I learned that its chancel was not built in a straight line from the nave. This architectural feature is called a 'weeping chancel', said to represent the lolling head of Jesus Christ on the cross. It has been suggested that the chancel was built this way to align it with leys or geodetic forces. Which, of course, may or may not exist.

Back in the 1930s an army major, F C Tyler, wrote a book developing Watkins' theory of straight tracks. It was reviewed in volume 47 of the *Surrey Archaeological Collections*. Tyler attempted to show that ancient sites were arranged on a geometrical plan or 'grid' and often fell on the circumference

of concentric circles. Apparently, Surrey is mentioned in passing in the book. Major Tyler doesn't follow Watkins' theory that the alignments arose from ancient tracks. Straight, triangular or circular - take your pick!

Some Earth Mysteries researchers have suggested that some ley lines may be 'corpse ways'. These traditional paths were used to convey the newly dead to a cemetery. They tend to be straight, as souls are said to travel in straight lines, and are thus used in preference to other, sometimes rather more convenient, roads. Corpse ways are also frequently marked by ancient sites and waymarks. The term 'spirit line' has been coined to cover corpse ways and related ghost and death tracks.

Author Paul Devereux has suggested that such tracks and other patterns on the landscape act as a map in the physical world of the routes taken by the minds of shamans under the influence of hallucinogens. Essentially, a shaman is a tribal medium who, after a long initiation, is able to commune with spirits. Once people began to forget their ancient beliefs and became frightened of 'witches' as portrayed by the Christian Church, they put up baffles such as yew hedges in order to confuse witches in their dead-straight night flights.

Ancient tracks used by Croydon's ancient but living citizens are scattered about the town and its environs: Iron Age tracks have been traced in Kingswood and Celtic field boundaries on Farthing Down, while Morton's Terrier, a land survey from 1492, mentions an ancient track in Woodside leading to Broad Mede, the common meadow and hayfield of Woodside. In the Conduit Lane area of Croham a

Pilgrim's Lane, bordered by a medieval hedge, is believed to form an old route to the Pilgrim's Well to the east of Coombe House. There is a tradition that pilgrims coming from various directions would make their way to Thomas à Becket's shrine at Canterbury via Croydon.

The oldest road in Croydon is said to be a track near Farthing Down. It led along the bottom of the Celtic field system, and later the Saxons sited their burial mounds along it. Another contender for the title of most ancient road is Green Lane, leading north to London through Norbury, an ancient 'green lane' through the forest, believed to be over 2000 years old. More recently, the Romans had a road from London south to Lewes which went through what is now New Addington, having split off from the more famous Watling Street at Peckham. A strip of wood now called Boundary Woods forms the eastern

boundary of Croydon and traces the route of the Roman Road. It stretches from Vulcan Way to King Henry's Drive.

For the sake of completeness, here are some more ancient tracks in Croydon:

- Mint Walk (originally stretching all the way from Wickham to Duppas Hill)
- Addington Village Road
- New Ditch/Wide Ditch, Riddlesdown
- Spring Walk (a path that led from Benson Spring to Surrey St)
- Duppas Hill path

A route that might have a future as an ancient track is a heritage trail devised by a group called 'Together in Waddon', which received a Council grant. The *Croydon Advertiser* in 1995 referred to plans for a noticeboard made of oak and hazel on Crescent Green in the middle of the estate. It would show the route and general community



Corner of Mint Walk and Fell Road

information. The route was meant to cover an area from the Clocktower complex through Duppas Hill to Purley Way. Other natural sites to be included were listed as Waddon Ponds and the river Wandle, but pride of place would be given to the Croydon Airport site. The group gets a few hits via Google, but in June 2005 I couldn't find any mentions of the heritage trail. Did it ever become reality?

COUNCIL CAPERS - STRIVING FOR PERFECTION

This is a quick look at some of the decisions we've put up with over the years from Croydon and Bromley Councils of all political persuasions. Sometimes the failures aren't even the Council's fault. Not directly, anyway. Some of the stories might pop up elsewhere on the site with greater detail - believe me, they bear repeating. In case you're wondering, Croydon's motto is 'Ad summa nitamur' ('Let us strive for perfection'). When they achieve it we'll have a parade, health and safety issues permitting.

ARABIAN NIGHTS

Addiscombe residents escaped hosting this Christmas festivity, despite the Council's best efforts. After complaints from locals and police opposition to the late-night alcohol licence, the Council finally pulled the plug on it. The organizers, Bestpartiesever, had wanted to hold an upmarket late-night fair with an Arabian theme in Ashburton Park at Christmas to attract up to 620 'corporate clients' every night from 1 to 22 December 2004. The parties were expected to include such traditional and fun attractions as a disco, rodeo camel, magic-carpet rides, dodgems and belly dancers. What exactly was Arabian about late licences for drunken office parties? Scheherazade wouldn't have recognized that in a thousand and one nights!

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Croydon Council was on a hiding to nothing over this one. We don't want our taxes to be wasted, but we do want Christmas cheer. In 2004 the Council said 'no' to lighting the streets. See **Seasonal Croydon** for more on who ended up with lights and who didn't.

TABERNER HOUSE

If an official Heritage Open Day leaflet

criticizes the Council's offices as a 'slab vilified on the grounds of taste and function', it must be bad. It was built in 1964-67 for the Council and was named after a Town Clerk who served from 1937 to 1963. The tower block is 250ft high, comprising 19 storeys. Its one saving grace is that its design allows it to be lit up at Christmas in the shape of a Christmas tree.

WOMBLE IN COURT

A farcical High Court hearing ensued in 1998 after Bromley Council had won an order to repossess the Crystal Palace Park site occupied by ecowarriors.

King Arthur, 77-year-old grandmother Mrs Yaxley and a womble appeared before the court. Campaigners were ordered to remove the womble, which had been made because a protester with the nickname Womble had been cited by the Council as occupying the site. The Council reportedly took the names from a newspaper article. The womble also appeared under his real name. A protester dressed as King Arthur was allowed to make a statement, as he was able to produce his passport giving his name as King Arthur Pendragon. The grandmother, accused of being a squatter, had only

visited the treetop protesters at the Big Willow Eco Village once, to take them some bread pudding.

Plans for the hugely unpopular development were finally abandoned in 2002.

ANOTHER ANCIENT COVER-UP

After years of legal wrangling and appeals, Croydon Council lost. Important Saxon remains were buried under concrete in central Croydon, and another chance to find out more about Croydon's history was lost until such time as techniques for interpreting them are improved. Well, that's what they said... Doesn't that make you wonder how archaeologists have managed to interpret the thousands of objects already catalogued in the country's museums? Croydon now has some spanking new apartment blocks that no one is going to be demolishing any day soon to allow historians to dig around looking for graves. See **Death and burial** for more.

THE CRYSTAL PALACE DITCH

The Crystal Palace Park Cascade is a 60ft ditch running from the Concert Hall Lake to the Fishing Lake. Its creation was approved by Bromley Council in 1999 as part of a multi-million pound 'raft of improvements' at the park. Rather than a 'cascade', what Bromley got was a ditch that is usually stuffed with leaves and litter. It was rejected for Heritage Lottery funding and has had to be relaid several times because of blockages and leaks.

Anglers say that, even in winter when there's lots of rainfall and the concert lake bowl is brim full, the cascade rarely

works. They regularly have to remove rubbish and leaves. Designer Kathryn Gustafson's business partner was quoted as blaming it on poor construction and underfunding, saying leaks from the concert bowl meant that the water level was rarely high enough to flow into the channel. The Council said it wasn't intended to flow with water



Cascade, Crystal Palace Park

all year round and defended the high standard of maintenance of the park. Another famous creation by Ms Gustafson is the Diana Memorial in Hyde Park.

THORNTON HEATH POND

Croydon has its own troubled waters. The pond stood on the original Thornton Heath, which was Norbury's common land. The pond had a history of accidents, with horses and carriages driving into it on foggy nights. There is a story that the Wheatsheaf Inn is haunted by the ghost of a former landlord's daughter who was brutally murdered there and dumped in the

water. Highwaymen were also hanged nearby. A fountain was erected in the middle of the pond, with a fence around the perimeter, to celebrate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897. It was filled in and turned into an ornamental garden in 1953, with a small pool. In 1975 this was filled in due to vandalism.

In 1996 it was announced that designers from Timpson Manley were to present proposals to Croydon Council in 1997 for bringing water back to the pond. For the suggested cost to the Council of over £100,000, we would get a 'publicly accessible piece of art'. The Arts Council National Lottery was to be approached for funding. The *Croydon Post* quoted the Council as saying the pond was in an ideal position to be a 'gateway to Croydon' and the site of a 'striking and imaginative water feature'. The team of architects was due to include a man whose aquatic work was featured at Gatwick's North Terminal and a man who contributed towards the design of Croydon Clocktower. The water feature was opened in January 2003, at a cost of £100,000 to £150,000, funded by the Council's Smarter Croydon budget. So, didn't we get the Lottery money? Just how accessible is it? Answers by email, please.

DROWNING, NOT WAVING
Croydon's many streams and rivers may have been driven underground in the 19th century to reduce the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera and typhoid, but the Council now views flowing rivers as A Good Thing. In 1996 the Council pressed ahead with plans to let water flow again in Croydon. And met with failure. The Millennium Commission rejected a joint bid from the Council and the Tidy Britain Group for

cash to fund improvements to the South Norwood Country Park. The proposal included converting the stream from a concrete-enclosed culvert to a landscaped watercourse to help the establishment of mammal, bird and plant species in an area of Croydon with few natural watercourses. The plans included interpretation boards and more educational material. Historical information would also be provided close to the site of the double-moated manor house that once stood there. The Millennium Commission had said that the scheme was highly worthwhile, but still rejected all three London bids put forward by Tidy Britain. WHY?

RAISING THE WANDLE

A report by London Mayor Ken Livingstone on 'Blue Ribbon Development' included the option of bringing the Wandle back to the surface. According to the *Croydon Advertiser*, the 'planning blueprint' of Croydon Council and the Mayor's London Plan wanted to use developments such as Prologis' plans for a car dealership and warehouse units on the former British Gas site on the Purley Way to open river channels, improve wildlife habitats and public accessibility.

Croydon Council rejected Prologis' original plans as the Development Control Committee was unhappy that they did not include proposals to bring the river to the surface. It was said that the refusal meant that any future plans for the land would have to include a scheme to get the river flowing again.

Prologis disagreed with the suggestion that the diversion of sections of the Wandle through landscaped areas could be financed by intensifying the development, as digging the river out

from its drain would be too expensive. Initial indications that approval was likely had led Prologis to pre-let the warehouses units, creating 500 jobs. These were then in the balance until a public enquiry could be held.

The 2004 enquiry agreed with Prologis that the river plan would make the development unviable. Despite Croydon Council's support from the Mayor, an environmental charity called the JetSet Club and the Environmental Agency, it lost. Another failed confrontation.

In 2004 the Council was still trying to improve the Wandle, as referred to in a *Croydon Advertiser* story about how it was working with JetSet and local schools to release trout fry in the river in the hope of establishing a breeding population.

MUSEUM PLANS DERAILED

Addiscombe railway station was closed in preparation for the construction of Tramlink. Many local residents and traders backed plans by the South Eastern and Chatham Railway Preservation Society to turn the old station into a preserved line and museum, with steam trains brought in specially. The Society discussed plans with the Council, located a diesel shunter and hoped to get funding from the Lottery Commission.

It was not to be. In 2000 the Council gave outline planning permission for turning the site into 29 houses and 36 flats, despite residents' concerns over congestion and loss of privacy. This followed six years of rows. The development saw the station and (allegedly haunted) sheds flattened. A Conservative councillor had wanted the listed building to be preserved, and various 'ghost hunters' pointed out the

hazards of building homes on a haunted site.

SUMMER 2004 - ANYONE SEEN OUR FAIR?

The Selsdon Country Fair was cancelled in 2004 because of problems over access for emergency vehicles. For years it attracted 20,000 visitors to Selsdon Woods. In early 2005 it was suggested that the show might return in 2007 if the Council could find the money to improve emergency access. Trees had caused potential health and safety problems. It would have cost £45,000 to stage the 2004 show, at a time when the Council had been strapped for cash.

The replacement hot-air balloon festival on Purley Way was cancelled at the last minute due to the site's being too wet for heavy vehicles after an unprecedented two weeks of summer rains. The Council admitted it was unlikely they would organize that sort of thing again. The fifteen balloons were to have been tethered, so the damp ground would not have affected the 'flights'. Three aircraft had also been due to land, but there were fears that the sodden ground might have prevented their taking off again. The *Croydon Advertiser* reported that the Council's involvement had been small, although it had hyped the event as a replacement for its cancelled Selsdon Country Fair.

The *Croydon Advertiser* interviewed Croydon Council's Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport, Stuart Collins, in September. He said that he had been out of the country on holiday when the town's first hot-air balloon festival had been cancelled, but pointed out that he couldn't have done anything about the weather. There was always a risk with outdoor events, and he had noted the

newspaper's delight in pointing out that the balloons had been intended to replace the Country Fair. Mr Collins mentioned that an earlier balloon event had had to be cancelled due to the foot-and-mouth outbreak.

VOTES FOR CHOCOLATE

The candidate from the Monster Raving Loony Party narrowly missed success in the Fieldway council by-election in 2005. Unfortunately, his six (count 'em!) votes weren't quite enough, but the candidate was praised for his courageous and diplomatic approach to politics. John Cartwright fought for a cause he believed in: chocolate. The electorate failed to notice his brilliance, but the hope is that he will be made Minister for Chocolate when his party gains power.

NAFF BADGE

Croydon Council's old badge was described by Council leader Hugh Malyan in 2002 as 'naff'. The Council voted in favour of adopting a more traditional design for its official crest. Mr Malyan also said the old design was too complicated and difficult to reproduce. The new one would be a 'concise' version of the old crest, omitting the motto but carrying over the water imagery (the blue wavy lines represent the Bourne, which some of our fellow citizens might actually want to forget). The *Croydon Guardian* told readers it would cost £1800 to register the new badge, but I never saw any mention of how much the entire design and rebranding exercise cost.

SPY BINS

Microchipped wheelybins provided by the Council will spy on households in Croydon, recording what we're throwing out. In 2005 Notags, a national group opposed to such things, advised residents to cover the chip with tin foil to

render it ineffective. Even Councillors were questioning the Council's motives. The chips were said to be intended to check whether households were producing more rubbish than expected. Offenders would then be offered 'help' in managing their rubbish. The chips would also check that all bins had been emptied. The Council was accused of out-KGB-ing the KGB. Notags admitted that the chips might be used innocently to start with, but could be used to build up a weekly inventory of a person's household.

The *Croydon Advertiser* published an email sent in by Maurice Townsend reminding people that science said that when a new technology was invented it would inevitably be used, despite any obvious moral objections. He pointed out that the Council hadn't initially mentioned that the new wheelybins would carry a microchip and now they were saying the chip wouldn't be used for spying.

ST VALERY, BEULAH

The allegedly haunted house on Beulah Hill was given listed status in January 1989 but still fell into a state of major disrepair. It was then bought by Ashfield Properties of the British Virgin Islands, and builders were hired to convert it into flats. They began to strip the period features, but Croydon Council planning officers visited in June 1993 and were stunned to see the damage. They launched a prosecution 'for altering the house without consent', but this turned into another legal failure for the Council when the magistrate gave the developers an absolute discharge. According to the *Croydon Advertiser*, Ashfield had discussed with English Heritage what they could and couldn't do and thought that they had been given the go-ahead for the work. So it

boiled down to a simple misunderstanding. They had spent a lot of money restoring it to its 'former glory', but without planning permission. All's well that ends well, and St Valery has been saved, but at what cost to the Council's coffers?