

THE HISTORY OF YOUR AREA

This photograph of Bellevue Road was taken around 1900 – at a time when Wandsworth was in the midst of a population and housing boom. Once mainly farmland with a succession of mills along its riverbanks, this was the beginning of Wandsworth’s remarkable transformation.....

There is little doubt that the River Wandle played a large part in Wandsworth’s rich history. The river’s steep fall made it one of the most powerful in the country attracting industry to its banks. In the Domesday Book of 1086, Wandsworth was already home to several mills, producing mainly flour.

In the late 17th century large numbers of French Protestants, known as Huguenots, made their home in Wandsworth after fleeing religious persecution at the hands of Louis XIV - the current coat of arms includes tear drops representing their sorrow. Many of them were highly skilled in textile processes and were drawn to the area’s cloth mills, setting up a hat industry for which Wandsworth was once famous.

Wandsworth has also been home to celebrated literary and political figures – Voltaire, Samuel Pepys and Thomas Hardy all lived here. And in the early 19th century Clapham

Common resident, William Wilberforce, along with the ‘Clapham Sect’ successfully campaigned for the abolition of slavery. With such influential inhabitants prepared to fight for its preservation, the green expanse of Clapham Common remained largely intact for people to enjoy. Unfortunately Wandsworth Common was not so fortunate and much of it was sold off for railways and new homes.

The Surrey House of Correction or Wandsworth Prison as we now know it, admitted its first inmate in 1851. Writer and poet Oscar Wilde spent the first six months of his sentence there and train robber Ronnie Biggs, along with three other prisoners, escaped from the prison in 1965.

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Photograph courtesy of Wandsworth Heritage Service



