

WASC 1942

Leaflet on Crane Park
Island Nature Reserve
(old Hounslow gunpowder
mills >



Crane Park Island Local Nature Reserve

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Date Rec'd	19 OCT 2001
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To: Robert Taylor,
Royal Gunpowder Mills,
Powdermill Lane,
Waltham Abbey,
Essex. EN9 1BN

October 15th 2001

Dear Robert,

Thankyou very much for taking the time to show me around the Gunpowder Mills last week - it was a fascinating tour and I very much enjoyed the day. I was particularly impressed with the visitor centre display and the wonderful film. What we are planning at Crane Park is on an infinitely smaller scale but I have come back with a host of ideas !

I have enclosed a copy of our site leaflet - also soem information about the connection between the old Hounslow Mills and the Gunpowder Plot that I thought might interest you.

Do let me know if you would like to visit us down here sometime - I would be happy to show you around..

Thankyou again

Kind regards

Alex

The Crane Park Project can be contacted at:
Crane Park Project, Heathfield Schools Annexe,
Powder Mill Lane, Whitton, Middx. TW2 6ED
Telephone: 081 898 9582 (24 hour answerphone)

Crane Park Island Local Nature Reserve lies on the River Crane, within Crane Park. Managed by London Wildlife Trust, Crane Park Project is one of the Trust's important 'key sites'. It is accessible to wheelchair users, and the sight impaired, having a well laid path with raised tapping rail. There is open access at all times. The Project encourages the use of the reserve by schools and community groups, and is happy to give advice on the use of the island as an educational resource. Bookings for trips should always be made in advance and details can be obtained from the Project Office. Regular events for people of all ages are held at the island. Watch the local press for details.



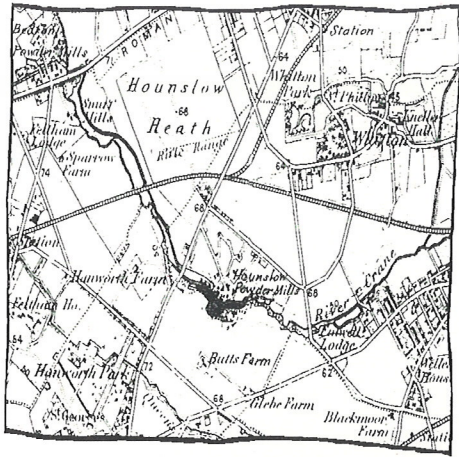
You can help London's wildlife by joining the Trust
Membership details from:
London Wildlife Trust, 80 York Way, London N1 9AG
Telephone: 071 278 6612/3

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CRANE PARK ISLAND LOCAL NATURE RESERVE





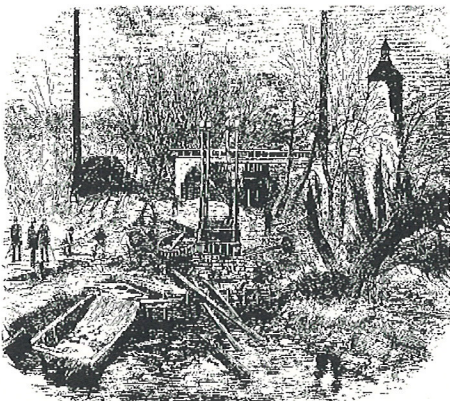
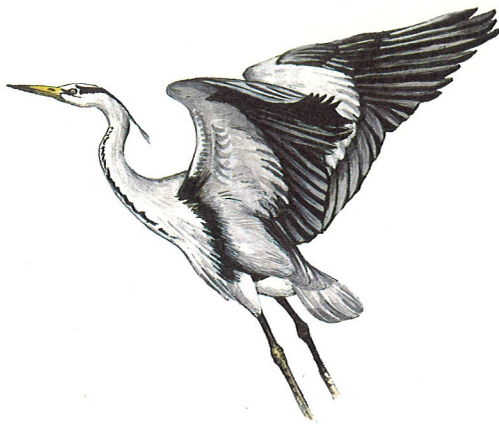
An old map of the area

Crane Park Island has not always been the peaceful haven that it is now. It was once the site of the old Hounslow Gunpowder Mills. Established in 1766, the mills were built on the River Crane as it provided essential water power. During that time the island was largely flooded to create a millpool, thus providing the head of water necessary to drive the mill machinery. This was controlled by the sluice gate that can be seen at the entrance to the island.

Gunpowder was manufactured from a mixture of charcoal, sulphur and saltpetre. Charcoal was made from the slow burning of willow grown on site. The other two ingredients were imported. Willow is a fast growing tree and regular coppicing (cutting the trunk of the tree down to its base to encourage sturdy new growth) ensures a constant supply of new wood. The willow trees on the island are still regularly coppiced to ensure their longevity and demonstrate this ancient method of woodland management.

Needless to say, the mills must have been a highly dangerous place to be. During their operational years from 1766 to 1926 no less than 55 explosions were recorded, many fatal. One explosion was even recorded by naturalist Gilbert White in his diaries, as far away as Selbourne in Hampshire. Both in Crane Park itself and on the island you can see large mounds, often topped with Horse Chestnut trees. These were built to shelter so-called 'danger buildings' and offer protection from the effects of blasts. Most of the buildings were made of timber, often roofed with turf. The effects of flying timber were less devastating than those of flying masonry.

When the mills finally closed in 1926, having enjoyed a reputation for many years for producing 'the finest black powder in Europe', the slow return to nature began. The millpool was drained, to be flooded again in the 1960's as an ornamental lake, but only for a short time. After the final drainage the main stream of the River Crane was established, leaving the backstream of the southern side of the island as the original course of the river.



Hanworth Powder Mills after the explosion, taken from a print of 1857

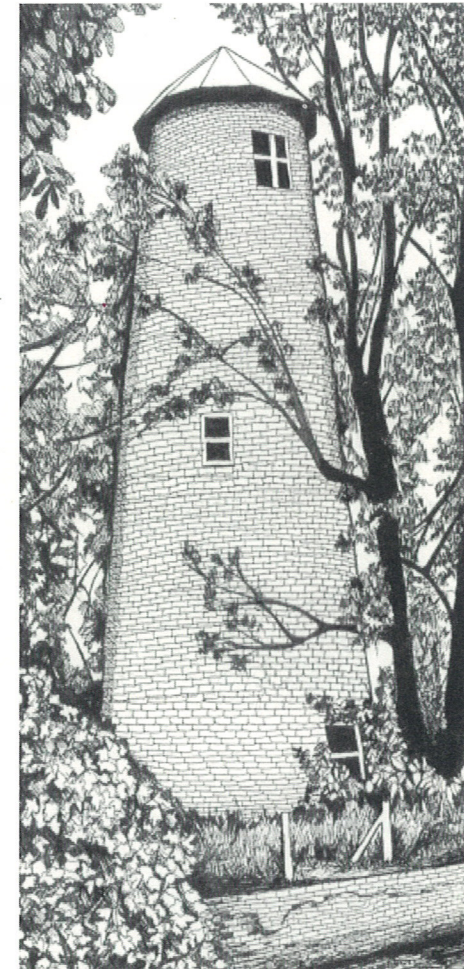
In 1983 work began to turn Crane Park Island into a nature reserve to be enjoyed by the local community. It is now a rich patchwork of habitats, playing host to an enormous variety of wildlife.

In 1986 management of the island was taken over by London Wildlife Trust, and it continues to be managed with the help of a warden. This has been made possible by continued grant aid from the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames. Crane Park Project works within the community to educate and increase people's awareness and enjoyment of the natural world. The island welcomes many visitors throughout the year, including the disabled who can now take advantage of the specially laid wheelchair path (kindly funded by Hampton Fuel Allotments Charity and the London Borough of Hounslow).

Perhaps no one enjoys their visits more than the hundreds of schoolchildren who come to the island on supervised visits. Many take advantage of the wide shallow stretch of river at the end of the island, ideal for river dipping and investigating the rich aquatic life of the Crane. The water quality is good and supports a wide range of species.

Crane Park Project is also involved with the refurbishment of the old tower that stands near the entrance to the island. Built in 1823 by a Mr. Jacobs of Hanworth, it has always been known locally as the 'Shot Tower', used for the manufacture of lead shot. However, since shot towers are traditionally a lot taller than this one it seems more likely to have been used as a watch tower for the Gunpowder mills. One sign of a spark and the bell that once sat at the top would be rung, and workers would run for their lives! We know too that at one time it was used as a pumping station to pump water upstream into the millpool. Now work is in progress to turn the tower into a nature study centre. This is an exciting project and one that will ultimately be of benefit to the whole community.

Please enjoy your visit...



The old tower, known locally as the 'Shot Tower'



Enjoying the river dipping

CRANE PARK ISLAND LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Dog Rose - symbol of England, the rose can be seen by the pathside in Summer



A coppiced willow in the former millpond



Herb Robert - a woodland plant



The Edible Frog

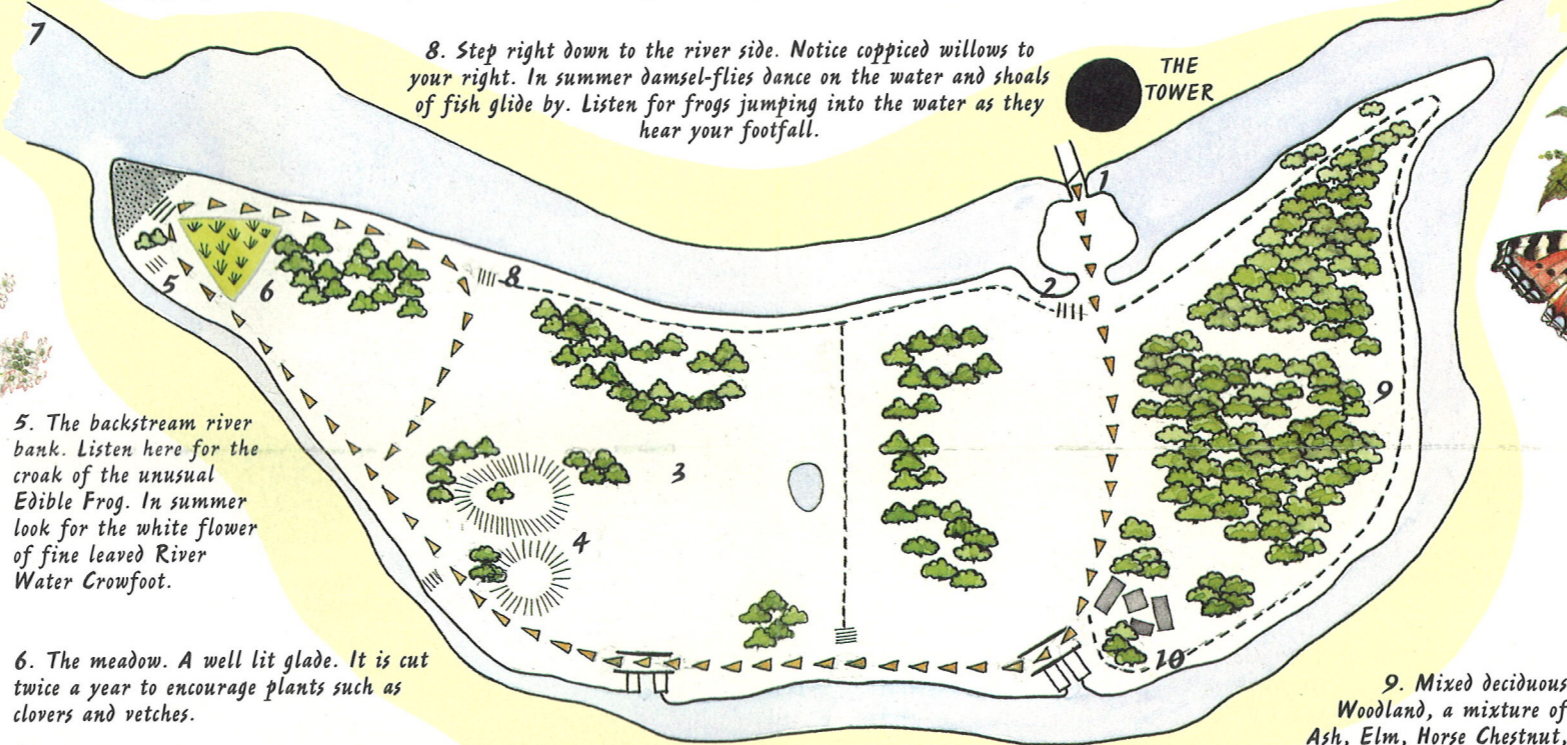


Crack Willow



The Kingfisher - its appearance is often preceded by a low whistle

7. The dipping platform. This is where children come to river dip. You may sometimes see a Heron here. 1. The Old Sluice Gate. 2. Site of old waterwheel.



8. Step right down to the river side. Notice coppiced willows to your right. In summer damsel-flies dance on the water and shoals of fish glide by. Listen for frogs jumping into the water as they hear your footfall.

5. The backstream river bank. Listen here for the croak of the unusual Edible Frog. In summer look for the white flower of fine leaved River Water Crowfoot.

6. The meadow. A well lit glade. It is cut twice a year to encourage plants such as clovers and vetches.

3. Former millpond. This contains species such as Nettles, Goose-grass, Indian Balsam, Hogweed and Golden Rod, as well as Goat Willow and Crack Willow trees.

4. Mounds that are remnants of the Gunpowder Mill, topped with Horse Chestnut trees.

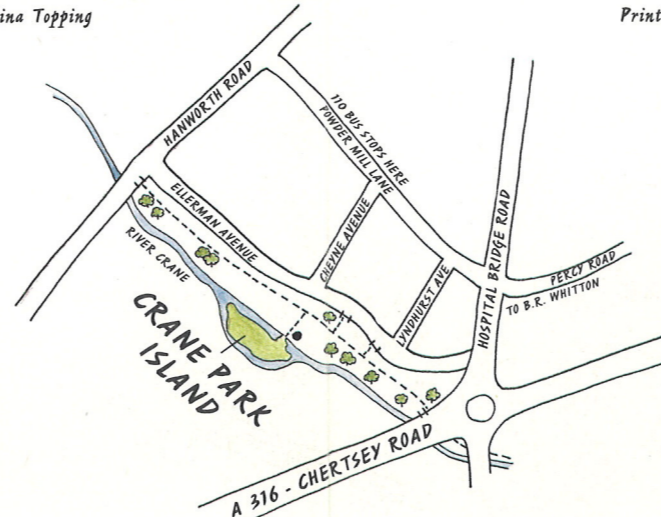
10. Mill Ruins
9. Mixed deciduous Woodland, a mixture of Ash, Elm, Horse Chestnut, Elder and Hawthorn. Fallen trees are left to encourage fungi. Pink-flowered Herb Robert grows here and delicate white-flowered Enchanter's Nightshade. Many birds nest and visit including the unusual Ring-necked Parakeet that has colonised Crane Park.

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Wild Teasel in flower



This project has received grant-aid from English Nature under the Community Action for Wildlife initiative. It has also been grant aided by the London Borough of Hounslow



The unusual Field Rose - each fragrant flower blooms for only one day



Lesser Celandine - "shining bright as the sun itself" (William Wordsworth) - This is one of the first flowers to appear in spring



Fallen wood is a host for Bracket fungus



Ivy - many trees on the island are covered profusely with Ivy. It is amongst their leaves that the Brimstone butterfly hibernates

Hogweed - this plant can grow to 6 foot tall

The River Crane has a rich underwater life



Small tortoiseshell butterfly - nettles are one of its food plants

