

## **Rambling Garden Blues part 7**

Hello everyone, welcome to Rambling Garden Blues part 7. In this episode we look at the refurbishment work on the Greenhouses at the Cambridge Botanical Gardens, still a work in progress. We travel down the Wandle valley, stopping off to take a stroll in Morden Hall Park. I was going to report on the systematic beds at Kew. Unfortunately they are being rearranged at the moment, I will tell you a bit about this work in progress later on in this article, but first we visit the Glasshouses at the Cambridge Botanical Gardens.



This refurbishment work has been going on for the past couple of years but it is part of the development of the greenhouses, opening them up for new possibilities. Although they were enjoyable enough before. I can see where things could be developed a bit. One place where I felt this could happen was the Succulent House. As much as I liked the way plants were laid out on benches. It seemed some plants were growing over other ones. This meant that some plants didn't get enough light, as such they went a bit out of shape. The Succulent House seems to be a work in progress at the moment. Some of the succulents have been positioned elsewhere, as we will find out in a minute.

The first house we come to is the joint Australian and South African House. Australia takes up one side of the room, South Africa takes up the other side. In both cases as far as I know the foliage represents the drier areas of these countries, the bush and scrublands. Some of the South African succulents have been positioned here amongst the other South African plants. Next to this is a house full of plants from the Canary Islands. The foliage on the Canary Islands is very diverse. Some of it having relatives in the Mediterranean or Africa. Some of it doesn't grow anywhere else. The Alpine House is still a work in progress. Hence there are a number of Alpine plants left out in the corridor in pots. The Tropical Rainforest House hasn't been touched yet. It is quite a big house, so I guess it will take a while to reorganise it. Next to this is a space where some of the plants are stored while their homes are being redeveloped. We then come to the previously mentioned Succulent House. After this is the Cactus House. This has been redeveloped and looks all the better for the facelift. Some more succulents are growing amongst the cacti. This includes both African and American succulents. One succulent *Pachyphytum Compactum* seems to be wrongly labeled as *Pachyphytum Oviferum*. *Pachyphytum* are a family of succulent plants from the Mexican mountains. However the two species have many differences in appearance. *Pachyphytum Compactum* being an upright succulent with either green leaves or leaves that are covered in a powdery bloom.

The leaves are very lumpy, and are very close together. As the plant grows, the lower leaves will fall off and the plant will grow up on a stem. *Pachyphytum Oviferum* (the Sugar Almond Plant, or Moonstones) has leaves that are light blue in appearance. They resemble Sugar Almonds hence the common name. In a sunny position the leaves can take on a pink or mauve hue. The plant will start growing upright. However in time the stem will start to sprawl. *Pachyphytums* are from the *Crassulaceae* family and are closely related to *Echeverias*. Sorry to nit pick, there is a lot that I don't know about plants. However I hope someone realises the error and changes the plant label.



*Pachyphytum Compactum*



*Pachyphytum Oviferum*

As well as the Alpines finding a temporary home in the corridor the usual plants that live in the corridor are still there. The *Clivias* seem to have been moved a little distance up the corridor. There is a lot of nice vegetation growing there, and places where you have to bend your head to avoid the plant above you. One can have similar experiences in the tropical corridors at the Chelsea Physics Garden, and the Oxford Botanic Gardens.

Around the corner from the other houses is the Fern House. This was being renovated last year. However it is now open again. The Fern House is quite a small building. In the old days the ferns were laid out in pots on benches. I remember there also being some mosses and lichens that you could look at through a magnifying glass. The benches have now gone, the house has been landscaped. There is a path in the centre. Either side of the path are beds with ferns in. The atmosphere is cool and humid. It is early days yet, but I look forward to seeing how the fern house has developed by the time I visit the gardens next summer. There are other greenhouses where one can find Ferns, especially in the tropical rain forest house. It was July 08 when I went to Cambridge, so I expect the renovation work has got a little further. A number of succulents had been planted outside the greenhouses. I didn't take any pictures of them, as I had already used up the film in my camera. But I remember the striking dark red colour of the *Aeonium* rosettes, and the beautiful blue almost white leaves of the *Echeveria* rosettes. Whether you like succulents or not, these are beautiful plants.

The admission fee to the gardens has gone up to £4 moan ,moan, grumble, grumble. But National Express who have taken over the railway from Liverpool Street had at the time reduced the train fare a little bit. Which was a small blessing to be thankful for. The garden is still the haven of peace that it has always been. It was a sunny day. The order beds are a treat to look at. I left the garden with a feeling of peace. Last summer the

weather was unpredictable. Some of my other garden visits took place when it was grey and raining. However I managed to chose a sunny day for my visit to the Cambridge Botanical Gardens, praise God.

If I remember correctly, in *Rambling Garden Blues* part 4 I said that I would report on the Order Beds at Kew. However they are currently being reorganised. As such they seem to be very much in the early stages of a work in progress. According to a notice telling us about this work, the plant families are moving about as the layout of family beds changes. This is so that the family beds give a more accurate representation of our knowledge of the evolutionary relationships of plants, also to increase our knowledge of these things, by studying the latest ideas on how plants are related to each other; these ideas being based on research done at Kew and other similar institutions worldwide.

However some beds had plants in them. The good old Asters were flowering. The Papaveraceae family, (the Poppy family) had a number of plants in flower. There were some points of interest. On visiting the Umbelliferae family, (the Carrot family). I learnt that as well as producing many edible plants. Plants that regularly appear in our kitchens, for example Carrots, Parsnips, Coriander, Parsley, Celery, and Dill, the family also features some extremely inedible plants. Two examples of this being Hemlock, a poisonous plant that was used in Ancient Greece as a way of executing people and Giant Hogweed, a plant that causes skin rashes.



The plant is giant like the name suggests and can be found all over the English countryside and on urban open spaces like Hackney Marshes. Because of its invasive nature it is illegal to grow Giant Hogweed in your back garden (*The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – Ed*). I don't know what country Hogweed comes from (*Central Asia – Ed again*)

Another bed that had a number of plants growing in it was the bed representing the Labatie family. This is the family of the Dead Nettle. (The Nettles that don't sting.) It is also the family that Mint comes from. You can see the Nettle and Mint like appearance in some other plants from the family. One example being Plecranthus. These plants are sometimes bushy, sometimes of a trailing nature; all species are semi succulent, a few species making an appearance in some succulent plant textbooks. They sometimes have waxy leaves; sometimes the leaves have hairs on them. Some Plecranthus species are known as Swedish Ivy. This is partly because they are popular house plants in Sweden and partly because of their trailing nature. They can also survive central heating better than true Ivy. A lot of Plecranthus species come from the African Continent. I think there are also some species from East Asia and Australia. Plecranthus are houseplants. I don't know if any would survive outdoors in the English winters. The Labatie family seems to be a family of extremes. For example there is Coleus. This is an attractive summer bedding plant (However if you took it in doors in the autumn, it would make an attractive house plant.) Lavender also comes from this family. At the other extreme we have Salvias. We talked a bit about Salvias in part 2 of the Punk Gardner on a visit to the Chelsea Physics Garden. However the Salvias here have thick leaves covered in white hairs. Perhaps the hairs keep the plant warm during the winter months.

The Stinging Nettle comes from the Urticaceae family. This family also contains a plant called Helxine. A plant more commonly known as Mind Your Own Business or Baby's Tears. It comes from Corsica and other parts of the North Mediterranean. It is sometimes seen as a weed in its habitat. But it is often used as a ground cover plant in greenhouses. It is a spreading plant with a mossy appearance. As such it can look very impressive growing as ground cover. At Kew there is a lot of Mind Your Own Business growing as groundcover in the Temperate House, also in the Wet Tropics section of the Princess of Wales Conservatory.

Another group of plants from the Urticaceae family that I am familiar with are Pileas. They come from Tropical America and South East Asia. Pilea Cadierei (also known as the Aluminium plant, its leaves have an aluminium like appearance.) is a popular species.



Pilea Cadierei (the Aluminium plant)

*Pilea Cadierei* comes from South East Asia. *Pilea Involucrate* (The Pan American Friendship Plant) is another popular one. The form *Pilea Mollis* (*Pilea Moon Valley*) is the one normally sold. It is a bushy plant with yellow green leaves with bronze veins and clusters of small pink flowers. There is a trailing species called *Pilea Nummularifolia* (Creeping Charlie). All these plants have a nettle like appearance. However some *Pilea* species are different in appearance. *Pilea Depressa* (Creeping Jenny) is a trailing plant with small round green leaves. *Pilea Microphylla* (the Artillery Plant) has a fern like appearance. In the summer when the plant is tapped it puffs out smoke like pollen. *Pilea Peperomioides* very much resembles certain *Peperomia* species. It comes from the Tasangshan mountain range in China. Growing at a high altitude it can handle quite cool temperatures but from what I have read it can't handle being outdoors in the English winter. In the greenhouses in botanical gardens that I visit, it always seems to be growing in the tropical rainforest section. Apart from one species that I have recently discovered *Pilea Pumila* (Canadian Clearweed) that grows in Canadian and North American woodlands, all other *Pileas* that I know of come from rain forests. As such they like moist humid conditions. They don't like central heating. Sadly I have never had much luck keeping *Pileas*. I don't know anything else about the *Urticaceae* family. Apart from *Pilea Pumila* and the Stinging Nettle, I don't know of any other member of the family that grows outdoors in temperate climates like Canada or England. There are probably other members that do. But my knowledge of the *Urticaceae* family is very limited at the moment.

Mixed in with the order beds are a number of beds with Roses in them. (There are Roses elsewhere in the gardens too.) Beyond the Rose beds there is a wall and an entrance through which a path goes. This leads through to the Rockery. This may be traveling to the West but my directions are often untidy.

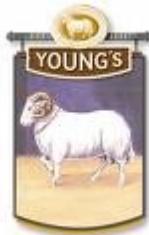
To the East, I think it is to the East, there is another wall. On the other side of this wall runs Kew Road. To the South the road goes to Richmond. To the North the road crosses the River Thames and comes to Brentford, and Kew Bridge station, on a line that runs from Waterloo. I never seem to find that the traffic on Kew Road bothers me much when I walk round this part of the gardens. At the North end of the order beds there is a small greenhouse containing some healthy looking Bonsai plants; also some allotments that look a delight in the summer. To the South of the order beds is a display of many different flowering plants. Here in the springtime there is a wonderful display of Peonies in flower.

Peonies seem to come from a variety of places, North America. The Mediterranean and China being three of their homes. Some species seem to come up in the spring and die back in the autumn. Other species are hardier and grow all year out of doors. I find it hard to describe what Peonies look like, some species have feathery foliage. Peonies have quite big flowers in different shades of red, pink, yellow, and white. The flowers are cup like in appearance, and often seem to have yellow stamens. I have also seen Peonies in the Rock Garden and in the Alpine House. They probably grow elsewhere in Kew Gardens too. Apparently Peony means Queen of the Herbs.



A plethora of Peonies

Anyway we leave Kew now and travel up to Wandsworth for a journey down the Wandle Valley; along the way we will be exploring Morden Hall Park. *“The smell of Young’s Brewery hung in the air, and the River Wandle flowed by, the River Wandle flowed by”*. These few lines reflect back to the early to mid 1960s, and one of the smells of my childhood. At the end of the 1950s or early 1960s, I can’t remember the year, we moved into a council flat near Wandsworth High Street. By the early 1970s, when the River Wandle got to the south side of Wandsworth High Street it disappeared under, the newly built Arndale Shopping Centre, to emerge again a little further on down Garratt Lane by King Georges Park. However the smell of Young’s Brewery hung around until the middle of the 90s, when it moved to Milton Keynes. We will come back to all this in a little while.



To the east of the river Wandle are two more rivers; The Falcon Brook and the River Efra. However as London grew both these rivers ended up underground. We will explore these two rivers in a future edition of the punk gardener. Despite the growth of South London the River Wandle managed to survive as an over ground river. This was because of all the industry that had sprung up along its banks. To the west of Wandsworth there are two more over ground rivers. Firstly there is the Beverley Brook; this brook flows into the Thames between Putney and Barnes, flowing through Roehampton and Richmond Park, through the Kingston Vale and New Malden. It passes under the Kingston By Pass and through Motspur Park and Cheam. I have been following the course of the river on the A to Z street map. I seem to lose its course in Cheam. (*The Brook rises at Cuddington Recreation Park in Worcester Park – Ed again, sorry*)

The second over ground river is the Hogsmill River. This river flows into the Thames at Kingston having flowed down through Berrylands. Here there are some sewage works alongside the river; they can be seen from the train. Berrylands station is on the main line from Waterloo to Woking, Guildford, and Portsmouth. It stands between New Malden and Surbiton. The river flows by the Kingston By Pass and through Tolworth, having risen in Ewell Village.

The River Wandle flows into the River Thames in Wandsworth. This is to the west of Wandsworth Bridge, and what used to be Wandsworth Gasworks. Part of the site is now taken up by what is described as a Solid Waste Transfer Station. The river then passes under the railway to the west of Wandsworth Town station. This line goes from Waterloo to places like Brentford, Staines, Richmond, Windsor, and Reading. The river then flows down to Armoury Way, here are two gasometers. This is all that remains of Wandsworth gasworks. After flowing under Armoury Way the river flows alongside the old Young's Brewery building before coming to Wandsworth High Street. Here it disappears underground, to re emerge again by King Georges Park. In the 1960s before the building of the Arndale Shopping Centre, there used to be a Swimming Baths near the River Wandle on the south side of Wandsworth High Street and a turning going off Wandsworth High Street. Down this turning was a street market. On the Wandle was a disused mill, I can't remember what the mill was used for.



River Wandle in Wandsworth Town Centre

Anyway moving along to King Georges Park. This is a nice little park with a number of playing fields. If I remember correctly back in the 1960s it had an outdoor swimming pool. I don't know if it still does. The banks of the Wandle as it flows through the park are nicely covered in vegetation. From here the River Wandle flows through the back doubles to Earlesfield. There is a road called Garratt Lane that follows the River Wandle's course as far as Summerstown. It is a long road stretching from Wandsworth High Street to Tooting Broadway. This stretch of Garratt Lane has always been a bit run down with three big ex Greater London Council housing estates, and a number of terraced streets. Obviously it is not as bad as it used to be. For example there is a little park opposite the Arndale Centre that runs up to St Anne's Hill and St Anne's Church. (The church on the hill with the pepperpot tower that I used to go to when I was young) but this stretch of Garratt Lane can still sometimes look a bit bleak. As we get to Earlesfield the Wandle passes under the previously mentioned main line from Waterloo. The one that goes to Berrylands. This is between Earlesfield and Wimbledon stations. There used to be a sewage farm here, but it is gone now. Garratt Lane continues to run parallel to the River Wandle. The streets on the north side of Garratt Lane are quite nice. The roads run up a hill to Wandsworth Common, and a very nice part of Wandsworth. However Wandsworth Prison also stands at the top of the hill. It is a grim building that I used to pass by a lot when I was young. I went to a Secondary Modern School that was near to Wandsworth Prison. On the opposite side of the road to Wandsworth Prison were some allotments. I seem to remember the railings being covered in Bindweed. An extremely troublesome plant, but one that produces attractive white flowers.



Wandsworth Nick

A bit further down Garratt Lane we come to Burntwood Lane, a road that also goes up the hill to Wandsworth Common, again there are some really nice streets turning off Burntwood Lane. Halfway up Burntwood Lane on the east side is a piece of land that was once a part of the grounds of Springfield Hospital, one of the last of the old Victorian Psychiatric Hospitals to still be used as a hospital. When I was young there were farm animals in the grounds. In the old days patients used to do farm work. Hence the term Funny Farm. As time went on farm work was replaced by industrial therapy, factory work done for little money. Industrial Therapy has often been considered to be an exploitative form of labour. Thank God for those with the insight to see the validity of creativity in mental health.

Back to Garratt Lane. Shortly after Burntwood Lane we come to Summerstown. At this point the River Wandle changes course to Colliers Wood. Here a small tributary joins the Wandle, this is known as the River Graveny. It is a small stream. It flows along the north side of the railway line that forms a boundary between Tooting and Colliers Wood. (For more information about this railway line see the punk gardener part 6.). The part of Tooting to the south of Tooting Broadway is known as Tooting Graveney. The River Graveny flows down from Norbury, which is just beyond Streatham. Here it is known as Nourbry Brook.



On its way from Colliers Wood the Wandle passes the site of another one time sewage farm. This is now Wandle Meadow Nature Park. I haven't been there yet. Perhaps it's a place I could visit this summer. Just before the Wandle reaches Colliers Wood High Street we pass another small park called Wandle Park. I haven't visited this park yet either. Perhaps I could incorporate it with a visit to Wandle Meadow Nature Park in the summer. There are a lot of pylons in this area which is perhaps a reminder of the Wandle's industrial past.

The Wandle passes under Colliers Wood High Street, shortly before the road becomes Merton High Street. It then flows past the newly built superstores before making its way down to Morden Hall Park. We will be returning to Morden Hall Park shortly. First we follow the rest of the River Wandle's course. The river flows to Mitcham from Carshalton Ponds. Here one of the sources disappears underground. Another source disappears underground at Waddon Ponds. Another source disappears underground in Beddington

Park. Waddon and Beddington are two districts on the outskirts of Croydon. The original source of the River Wandle was to the South of Croydon in the North Downs. It has been speculated how, in prehistoric times, it flowed from the Surrey Wield then across the North Downs. There is an occasional stream known as the Bourne that runs through Caterham and Smithan. The later area being a part of Coulsdon. This is seen as being a source of the Wandle, however it only really surfaces after the rain has fallen. But the Wandles sources come from rainfall that percolates through chalk on the North Downs to rise in Waddon and Carshalton Ponds and Beddington Park.

For many Centuries the Wandle used to flow from the South of Croydon, becoming about 20 feet wide by the time it got to Croydon Old Town. Here it would diverge into smaller channels. However as Croydons population grew the Old Town streams became little more than open sewers. They got filled in or culverted in 1840 after outbreaks of typhoid and cholera had taken place. It then flowed through marshy fields where Wandle Park now stands. (This is not the formerly mentioned Wandle Park in Colliers Wood, but a park with the same name on the outskirts of Croydon.) When the Park was created the Wandle got used to form a boating lake. However the lake kept drying up so it got filled in. The Wandle now runs underground past where the local gasworks used to stand and under the Purley Way. It then comes out into daylight at Waddon Ponds, and Carshalton Ponds.

At one time the River Wandle was home to many fish. The most famous being Brown Trout. There were also Watercress Beds, and Lavender Fields. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution the Wandle became heavily industrialised, at one point being one of the most polluted rivers in England. The main industries at the time being tobacco and textiles. Over the years the industry grew. The pollution on the River Wandle got worse until the Wandle got seen as being little more than an open sewer. The pollution was seen as being at its worse in the 1950s. There was much industry on the river banks, as the Wandle ran through areas such as Wandsworth, Earlesfield, Merton (South Wimbledon), and the area outside Croydon known as Beddington.

The River Thames between Battersea Bridge and Wandsworth Park on the borders of Wandsworth and Putney used to be very industrial. In 1966 shortly after leaving school I got a job in a book warehouse that was situated just off the York Road. This is a road that follows the River Thames from Battersea to Wandsworth. (The bit of York Road between Wandsworth Town station and Fairfield Street is now called Old York Road.) Back in the 1960s the area was very run down. The combined smells of the local factories became known as the Battersea smell. These smells used to be a part of my daily life and I grew to accept them. When the wind was in the right direction the Battersea smell used to drift across the River Thames to Hyde Park. The north side of the Thames between Battersea Bridge and Wandsworth Bridge was much the same. First there was the Worlds End area of Chelsea. It is hard to believe it now, but in those days Worlds End was seen as a slum area. This is where Chelsea Power Station used to be where Chelsea Creek joins The Thames, and alongside which runs the Willesden Junction to Clapham Junction branch of London Overground. The other side of Chelsea Creek is the Sands End area of Fulham. This area again was quite run down. There was a large Gasworks here, and Fulham Power Station stood near Wandsworth Bridge.

*(Editors interjection – Sands End is immortalised by the very Untidy Worms in their poem / piece Sands End)*

By the end of the 1970s the industry on both sides of the Thames started to disappear. The same thing started to happen on the River Wandle. By the late 80s people started making attempts to clean up the River Wandle. Their work has been to good effect. As a result fish are finding their way back into the river, including the famous Brown Trout. Many birds are finding their way back to the banks of the Wandle as well. The fish population has caused many anglers to go fishing in the Wandle. The favourite spot being Colliers Wood. I don't know how edible the fish would be but it is a positive sign that fish can survive here.



Last October I visited Armoury Way in Wandsworth. This is near where the Wandle goes into the Thames. You could still see how the area used to be industrial. I walked up a pathway that ran of Armoury Way beside the Wandle, it was late afternoon, and it felt a bit eerie at times. The sort of feeling one might get walking through an industrial area. But looking at the River Wandle, one could feel the change. As well as hardy urban shrubs like Buddleia, there were many other things growing along the river banks. I saw a stretch of the river covered in what looked very much like Watercress. I don't think it would be edible though. It should be noted however that a number of birds are now roosting at the mouth of the Wandle, where it runs into the Thames.

Anyway we finally come to Morden Hall Park.



The Park is situated between Morden and Mitcham. It covers 125 acres of parkland, with the River Wandle meandering through. Before we explore the park I will give you a little bit of the parks history.

The estate was originally owned by Westminster Abbey. While there is evidence of an earlier Manor House, Morden Hall Park dates back to 1770. The estate contains a variety of natural landscapes including parkland, meadow and marshland. There are also a number of historic buildings. The hall was owned by the Garth family for generations.

It was occupied as a school for young gentlemen around 1840, until it was sold by Sir Richard Garth to a tobacco merchant Gilliat Hatfield 1827 -1906. The hall was a military hospital during the First World War. Gilliat Hatfield's son Gilliat Edward Hatfield 1864 to 1941, left the core of the estate including the house to the National Trust. Gilliat Edward Hatfield lived at the nearby Morden Cottage which he considered better suited for his life as a Bachelor. The formal garden of the cottage is surrounded by an unusual collection of ornamental trees, including one of the oldest Yews in England.

Outside the main park the remainder of the estate has been taken up by housing developments, stretching between Morden, South Wimbledon and Colliers Wood. With an industrial estate on Deer Park Road.



There are various ways to get to Morden Hall Park. One can get the Northern Line to Morden or you can get a British Rail train to Morden South or the Croydon Tramlink to Morden Road or Phipps Bridge stations. The Croydon Tramlink runs on an old railway line that used to run between Wimbledon and West Croydon. When the tram gets to West Croydon it goes up on to the main road. It then goes back on to old railway lines the other side of Croydon to go to places such as Elmers End and Beckenham Junction. It runs a frequent service. Along the route there are many level crossings. None of these level crossings have gates and, as such, I sometimes worry about their safety. As far as I know there have been no serious accidents. The tram link has connections with British Rail at West Croydon, Wimbledon, or Mitcham Junction. One can get to Mitcham Junction from Victoria, London Bridge, or on the Thameslink line via Blackfriars and Elephant and Castle but make sure you get the Wimbledon via Sutton train, rather than the Sutton via Wimbledon train. The quickest way to Mitcham Junction is probably to get the train from Victoria.

When I go to Morden Hall Park, I normally get the tram from either Mitcham Junction or Wimbledon to Phipps Bridge. On the north side of Phipps Bridge station is Mitcham, and the Phipps Bridge Estate, a housing estate that looks like it might have been built in the 1970s. On the south side of the station is a gate that leads into Morden Hall Park. A level crossing takes us across the railway tracks and into the park. This level crossing also connects the Phipps Bridge estate with the park. Walking through the gate and in to the park we come upon a meadow area with lots of trees. This is quite a beautiful area to visit in the autumn. On the other side of the central path we look out towards a wilder area. We will however take a stroll down the central path. It is not long before we cross a tributary of the River Wandle. A footbridge takes us across this stream. We then travel on towards some stables, they are not used as stables any more.

We pass another tributary from the River Wandle. After the stables we cross another fast running tributary of the River Wandle. The reason for the speed of the water, is the water mill that stands on the east side of the bridge. Also on the east side of the bridge is a snuff mill.



This is a reminder of the early industries that stood along the River Wandle. I don't know if they make snuff any more. But as you probably know, Snuff is tobacco ground into powder, that you put up your nose and it makes you sneeze. I think you put it on your finger and sniff it up your nose. I was more of a Players No6 man myself. But I did try Snuff on a few occasions, and I sneezed. Growing out of the wall of the Snuff Mill are a few ferns. They would be getting a lot of moisture from the fast flowing water, and the water that sprays up into the air, and of course the rain when it falls.

Just past the bridge we come to what used to be Morden Hall. On the west side is the restaurant and bookshop, both in the same building. I have yet to use the restaurant, so I don't know what the prices are like. While I have not bought any books from the bookshop yet I have looked at some of the books; they have a lot of interesting books on Surrey. Books on walks through the Surrey countryside, walks between different Surrey pubs, walks between different Surrey Youth Hostels, and more. There were also books on haunted Surrey, and the history of Surrey's railways. One day I might invest in some of these books. On the east side of the path is the garden centre. The indoors part has a large selection of garden tools, composts, fertilizers, pots. Behind this is a selection of house plants. They are kept in a good condition. Mostly they are reasonably priced. I did buy a couple of Streptocarpus (Cape Primroses) there. Streptocarpus comes from South Africa. They resemble a Primrose in shape, but they are from the African Violet family. The outside part of the garden centre is very colourful, especially in Spring and Summer. Even if you aren't buying anything, it is still a treat to walk around. When we first leave the indoor part of the garden centre, and venture into the outdoor part, we see a lot of different types of flowering plants. Amongst them there is a selection of Alpine and Rockery plants. Half way down the garden centre we cross another tributary of the River Wandle. On the other side there are garden trees and shrubs. I remember seeing some rather large Lavender bushes. Also here are big plants like Yuccas, and Cordylines.

I think Cordylines are related to Yuccas. However they come from Australia and New Zealand. Some Cordylines are tender houseplants. Others are perfectly Hardy in the British climate. Yuccas come from South West U, S, A, and Mexico. Many species seem to be hardy in England. Both plants have a similarity in appearance. Some grow up on stems. Some species are stem less, but they take over a big space when they grow.

We now walk back through the garden centre. We cross back again over the River Wandle, past the Snuff Mill. Here we come to the front of Morden Hall. There is a big Rose Garden here. It is made up of some big lawns. A tributary from the River Wandle runs through the middle of the garden. Scattered all over the lawns are many Rose Beds containing many different coloured Roses. They are all upright shrubby type roses. There are no Rambling Roses. But it is a nice display.



I should explain that Morden Hall Park is in a kind of Wandle Delta. That explains why there are tributaries arriving from all over the place. The other Wandle Delta of course is where it goes into the Thames in Wandsworth. Anyway we now walk to the west. Here we come to a wooded part of the park. In the middle of this we cross another branch of the Wandle, possibly the main Wandle stream. This is a very beautiful part of the park. It is wild and very green. There is an old footbridge covered in plants. There is another footbridge which we will now cross. The river here has many plants growing on its banks. Covering quite a big stretch of the water is something that looks very much like watercress. However I don't know how edible it will be. Sadly last time I was there I saw a number of beer cans in the water. But I won't let it spoil the beauty that there is here.

We now carry on down the path. Soon we come to the marshy part of the park. The area is full of plants that are associated with marshland. The plant life here is very vigorous. There are places here where the ground looks dry because of the vigorous plant growth. But should you step off the path you would soon feel water seeping through your shoes. Two paths branch here. One carries straight on, and travels towards Morden Road. The other path travels north towards the tramline. We will take that path. On the west side of the path we see the wetlands areas continue. On the east side of the path we see a lot of bushes and shrubs growing wild, in a rather untidy fashion. A bit like open common land. When we get to the north end of the path we come to the Croydon tramlink. There is a level crossing taking us across to the other side. This is to Merton, there is an industrial estate here, and Deer City Farm. I have yet to visit the city farm. Perhaps I can do that on one of my visits to the park in the summer. To the east of this we have the River Wandle flowing down from Merton and under the tramlink then into Morden Hall Park. On the other bank of the Wandle from Merton we have Mitcham and the Phipps Bridge Estate.

A little earlier on in this article I expressed my concern about the safety of the level crossings on the Croydon tramlink. This is an example of my concern. By the railway track are bushes that do obscure ones view a bit, especially to the east. The trams do travel quite fast. Still lets hope that things are well enough coordinated to stop accidents from happening. Lets not be pessimistic. Now we will travel south again back to the green wooded bit. Then we will take the northbound path back to Phipps Bridge station. I normally end up getting a tram to Mitcham Junction, and going to Victoria. But sometimes I go to Wimbledon and get a train to Waterloo.

Back around 2003, a friend who at the time lived in South Wimbledon introduced me to Morden Hall Park. It was a few years before I returned to the place. But I am glad that I did.

Next time I will be telling you about the Winter Garden at the Cambridge Botanical Gardens, and wherever else my garden wanderings take me. Spring won't be too long in arriving now.

Peace and Love Frank.

For information about the River Wandle there are a number of websites. Here are a few of them.

For the history of the River Wandle visit the wikipedia free encyclopedia at [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

Visit the Wandle Trust at [www.wandletrust.org](http://www.wandletrust.org)

For fishing in the River Wandle visit [www.wandlepiscatator.net](http://www.wandlepiscatator.net)

On You Tube there is a video of the River Wandle. Someone filmed the Wandle from it's source to the River Thames, except, of course, where the Wandle disappears under the Arndale Centre. The video focuses on the banks of the river and the parks that it passes through. In doing this it helps to show the good work that has been done cleaning the river up. Though sadly the battles with pollution will probably be ongoing.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHD2\\_hg6XOI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHD2_hg6XOI)

There is a Wandle guide that was produced by The Wandle Group and Sutton Leisure Services. I got my copy from the Wandsworth Museum. However the Wandsworth Museum is currently closed but you can contact Sutton Council's Leisure Services. I don't know the email address. Or you can write to the London Borough of Sutton Leisure Services at Central Library St Nicolas Way Sutton Surrey SMI 1EA. The book is extremely valuable. Not only does it tell you about the history of the river. It also shows the walks that one can take alongside the river.

There are plans for a new Wandsworth Museum to be opened at a new venue in 2010.

For the history of the Wandsworth Museum. (Founded in the 1980s) visit

[www.timeleisure.co.uk](http://www.timeleisure.co.uk)

For Morden Hall Park there are a number of websites that offer interest. A history of the park can be found at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mordenhallpark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mordenhallpark)

For some interesting photographs of the park visit [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-mordenhallpark-2/w-mordenhallpark-photogallery](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-vh/w-visits/w-findaplace/w-mordenhallpark-2/w-mordenhallpark-photogallery)

Also for photos visit [www.jsmusic.org.uk/gallery/morden](http://www.jsmusic.org.uk/gallery/morden), and

[www.urban75.org/london/morden-hall-park](http://www.urban75.org/london/morden-hall-park). Here some people took a winter walk between Morden and Colliers Wood. In doing so they took some nice photos of Morden Hall Park in its winter glory.

For tourist information visit [www.gardens-to-go.uk/morden-hall-park.html](http://www.gardens-to-go.uk/morden-hall-park.html).

Also [www.aboutbritain.com/mordenhallpark.htm](http://www.aboutbritain.com/mordenhallpark.htm), or [www.timaps.co.uk](http://www.timaps.co.uk), or [www.ukattraction.org.uk](http://www.ukattraction.org.uk)

For information about Peonies visit [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/peony](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/peony)

For information on growing Peonies visit [www.uri.edu](http://www.uri.edu)

Also [www.paeonia.com/htmlpeonies/grow.htm](http://www.paeonia.com/htmlpeonies/grow.htm)

Two other Peony web sites are [www.peonypassions.com](http://www.peonypassions.com), and [www.ag.ndsu.edu](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu).

Earlier on in this article I talked about a family of succulent plants called Pachyphytum. There is a web site at [www.crassulacae.com](http://www.crassulacae.com) Here you can see many photos of Pachyphytum, Echeveria, Sedum, and other related species, growing in their habitat. Many of these photos are from different parts of Mexico. However there are a few photos of Sedum species, and many photos of another family called Dudleya that are growing in the western USA. Places like California, and Oregon. I think there is also one Sedum species from Peru.



These photos are extremely interesting showing how the plants grow in their habitat. Some plants grow down cliffs, sometimes rather precariously. Others grow in rather dry rocky conditions. Sometimes they grow close to a prickly cactus or spiny Agave, in doing so perhaps they are protecting themselves from animals in search of food. However in some photos these plants seem to be surrounded by Air Plants including Spanish Moss, which means there must be some moisture around. Other species seem to be growing in more lush conditions. There are a few Echeveria species seen here growing as epiphytes on rain forest trees. These photographs are of great interest. In relation to Dudleyas, These succulents are very closely related to Echeverias. Some have green rosettes, others have rosettes that are covered in a white powder. Some form clumps, others don't branch quite so much. They grow in Mexico, California, Baja California, and Oregon When the leaves die they tend to cling to the stem. If you are growing a Dudleya as a house plant, it may be wise to take the dead leaves off as they can attract mealy bug. This little pest looks like bits of white wall. It hides in places where you can't see it, and eats away at the plant until the plant collapses. If I catch a plant when it is in the early stages of mealy bug. I take the pest off with a damp cotton wool bud. I then change the pot and compost. When the plant is repotted, I spray it with washing up liquid, diluted with warm water. This is something that I learned from my Dad, and it seems to be quite effective. Unfortunately there are times when the mealy bug has taken over the plant, and it is too late. Sadly then there is no choice but to throw the plant away.

Earlier on in this article when talking about a family of plants related to the stinging nettle called Philea, I mentioned another family of plants called Peperomias. They are from the Piperaceae family. This is the same family as the Pepper plant. (The pepper that we sprinkle on our dinner.) There are many different species of Peperomias. The popular ones are often the bushy ones with corrugated leaves.

A very popular species is Peperomia Caperata:



The plant has green corrugated leaves. There are also species with red leaves, and also a variegated variety. Other bushy species include Peperomia Hederaefolia which has silver (metallic) leaves. There is Peperomia Argyreia (The Watermelon Peperomia). This plant has silver leaves with green stripes. Another bushy species Peperomia Fraseri has white sweetly scented flowers at the top of stems. The actual plant reminds me of an African Violet in appearance.

Other Peperomias have curious flower heads that are made up of a lot of tiny flowers fused together on the stem. On some species, for example the recently mentioned Peperomia Caperata, the flower stems are quite thick and very curious. On other species the flowers are thinner, but are still quite curious. There are a number of Peperomias that grow upright. One very popular species is Peperomia magnoliifolia Variegata.



This plant has succulent stems and green leaves splashed with yellow. There is a plain green variety. But it is the variegated one that you normally see in garden centres. It is sometimes called Desert Privet, but it actually grows in the American rain forests. The most popular trailing Peperomia is probably Peperomia Scandens Variegata. This plant has succulent green leaves with yellow edges on trailing stems. There are two small trailing species that are sometimes seen. Peperomia Roundfolia has small round green succulent leaves on wiry stems. I was lucky enough to find one on sale in my local Tescos about four years back. It is still growing strong. Peperomia Prostrata has small marbled leaves on wiry stems.

There are a number of miniature Peperomias. Many of these have attractive red stems, and leaves that are green on top and red underneath. There are also some very succulent Peperomias. These species sometimes appear in succulent text books. A lot of Peperomias grow in the American Rain Forests, From Florida through Mexico and the Caribbean and South America. There are also species growing in the Pacific Islands, Africa, Madagascar, and tropical Asia. Many species either grow on the forest floor, on rotting tree trunks, on trees as Epiphytes, or sometimes on mossy rocks. However there are some succulent species that grow in the more arid areas of Peru and probably elsewhere. I once had one of these succulent species, Peperomia Ferreyrae. I treated it like my other Peperomias and it rotted. However on my first visit to the Cambridge Botanical Gardens, I saw Peperomia Ferreyrae growing amongst the desert succulents with a sign by it saying keep on the dry side. When I found Peperomia Roundfolia on sale in Tescos. I also found Peperomia Ferreyrae on sale. I bought it and treated it like my desert succulents. And the plant is still doing well.

The hot peppers that we sometimes have with our food come from a different family. They are from the Potato family (Solanace). This family also includes a couple of house plants. The Ornamental Peppers, and the Ornamental Cherry. However the fruits on both these plants are not edible, and in the case of the Ornamental Cherry are poisonous. Much unlike the Chillies and Peppers that we have with our meals.

Does anyone remember a band from the early 1970s called Chilli Willie and the Red Hot Peppers. Did they have Martin Stone from Mighty Baby on guitar? Mighty Baby of course grew out of mid 60s mod band the Action. (*see separate Big Untidy article – Ed*)

For more information about Peperomias, there is an interesting web site at [www.peperomia.net](http://www.peperomia.net) This web site has photos of a number of different Peperomia species. This helps to show the diversity in appearance of different members of the family. The photos show Peperomias growing both in cultivation, and also in their habitat. An article about Peperomias can also be found at [www.peperomia.net](http://www.peperomia.net). The Wet Tropics section of the Princess Of Wales Conservatory at Kew Gardens, has an interesting collection of Peperomia species, just through the door from the American Cacti and Succulents. The old greenhouses at Wisely Gardens had an interesting collection of Peperomias. But I haven't been to Wisely since they built the new greenhouses. So I don't know what their Peperomia collection is like now.

Earlier on in this article I mentioned how industrial the area around York Road Battersea used to be. However the Nags Head pub on York Road was one of the homes of the late 60s British blues boom. Here there were gigs from bands like Peter Greens Fleetwood Mac, Stan Webb's Chicken Shack featuring Christine Perfect on piano, Savoy Brown Blues Band, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, early Jethro Tull with Mick Abrahams on guitar, guitarist Gordon Smith and many others. It's quite possible that Siren with a young Kevin Coyne played there. Also Free in their early days rehearsed at the Nags Head. They quite possibly played there too.

That's all for now .  
All the best  
Untidy Frank

Stan Webb's Chicken Shack (with Christine Perfect), responsible for one of Untidy Barry's very all time very favourite singles of very all very time, Tears In The Wind (Blue Horizon)

