

South Norwood Country Park history

The land was originally used for agriculture but has also been used for pottery and brickworks which involved extensive quarrying which was subsequently backfilled. For about a hundred years the site served as a sewage farm for the Corporation of Croydon who acquired it piecemeal from 1862 onwards, the last acquisition was as late as 1951.

The sewage farm was never a success for the subsoil was London Clay and the flooded fields would remain wet for months without draining away. A series of concrete channels were constructed over the farm to direct the sewage out over the numerous fields.

With a change in the methods of treating sewage the irrigation beds were abandoned and a series of round filter beds were built in the centre of the site. This change in sewage disposal meant that the fields were not used for many years and in that time a great variety of wetland grasses and vegetation has grown virtually undisturbed.

The sewage works was closed in 1967 and the filterbeds dismantled down to ground level, the south western end of the site was then extensively tipped with some rubbish but mainly waste from the highways such as road scrapings, old kerbstones and concrete.

Old plans of the area show a double-moated site near the open stream, and this is shown very clearly on the Estate Map of Thomas Morley dated 1736 and on another dated 1836. On the Thomas Morley map the site was called La Motes which suggests possibly an eighteenth century ornamental feature. The site was excavated in 1972 by the Croydon Historic and Scientific Society but this was limited mainly by the very wet nature of the site which caused all excavations to be quickly flooded.

The highest point on the site is the viewpoint which is an artificial mound created mainly from hardcore tipping from wartime demolition. The viewpoint was landscaped in 1988 at the beginning of the project to develop a Country Park on the site.

Two streams run through the site from the Albert Road end of the site to Elmers End Road. The southern water course is an open brook which runs along a line where the London Clay meets the Blackheath Beds (sands and gravels) the other water course runs in a deep concrete channel along the north western boundary.

The sewage farm had a community of plants which, although they are not particularly rare, are interesting because of the scarcity of a similar wetland habitat in the area. The aim of the Country Park was to preserve the wetlands and also develop new meadow lands on the areas that had been tipped once they had been made safe. There are a wide variety of birds which live on the site or regularly visit and these include Mallard, Kestrel, Pheasant, Gulls, Skylark, Warblers, Tits, Finches and Linnets. Over twenty variety of butterflies have been spotted on the site and also several varieties of moth.