

# The History of Kew Pond

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*We thought our readers would be interested to learn more about some of our local amenities. Our Treasurer, Mike Adams, spoke to Diana Dunrossil, who leads the team of volunteers who look after Kew Pond, to learn a little of its rich history.*

Not many passers-by, or those who stop to feed the ducks, realise that Kew Pond is possibly the most ancient historic site in the Borough of Richmond Upon Thames and dates back to before the Norman Conquest. It is thought to have originally been a natural pond fed from a creek on the Tidal Thames which was enlarged to serve as a fishery in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. It is thought to date back to a grant made in 996 by the Saxon King Ethelred to the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Winchester and to be “a fishery at Kaio juxta Braynford” mentioned in historical accounts and charters from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. From the 1350s onwards, the fishery was leased to Merton Priory. The last mention of the fishery in these accounts was made in 1533 when it was unlet and it does not appear in the survey of the Priory’s accounts made in 1536 following the dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry V111. It is believed that King Henry V111’s barge was moored in the creek leading to the pond in 1530 when the King moved from York Palace to Richmond Palace.

With the development of Kew Green in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the “fishery” changed to being a village pond situated in the north eastern corner of Kew Green which was used for watering livestock and cleaning carriage and cart wheels. The pond is clearly shown in the 1771 Manor Survey of Richmond where it is referred to as a pond rather than a fishery. In 1824, a herdsman was appointed, one of his duties being to drive the cattle to water at the pond on Kew Green. In the same year, the creek was partly filled in and built over to give access to the King’s School which was built that year to the north of the pond. As the pond has no natural inflow, it could only be filled once a month from the river when the tide of the River Thames was exceptionally high. This resulted in low lying water levels within the pond, especially following evaporation in the summer, and frequent insanitary conditions from the exposure of a muddy smelly pond base.

In 1887, the Commissioner of HM Works proposed to fill in the pond as it was now considered a health hazard but local residents appealed against the idea. In the early 1890s in an attempt to rectify this problem, a concrete ramp was built and the walls were concreted over. The bottom of the pond was concreted over in 1934/5. At the same time, railings were erected round the pond. Following flooding in 1965, the remainder of the creek was filled in and a network of drains was constructed to allow street drainage from the surrounding area to flow out to the river and river water to flow into the pond through sluice gates when a heavy iron flap, which can only be accessed from the river bank at low tide, is opened.

Richmond Council experienced difficulties in keeping the pond filled and by the mid 1950s, the pond was being used as a car park, a playground and a rubbish tip and many complaints were received from neighbouring houses about noise disturbance at night. By 1978, there was a serious threat that it would be filled in and turned into a car park. At that point, the **Kew Society** together with local residents put forward plans to restore the pond to a natural state.

After some delay, Richmond Council finally called a meeting in Kew Parish Hall In 1981. The meeting was well attended and after much discussion, it was decided that as the process of filling the pond depended on the height of the tide on the River Thames, the only solution was to allow volunteers to take this over on a regular basis. Names of volunteers who came forward were recorded and a date set for instruction. Unfortunately tide times very often fall outside normal working hours and the only two volunteers able to attend on a regular basis were Peter and Bridget Wait who lived in one of the houses overlooking the pond. For the next thirty years, volunteers led by Bridget Wait, operated on an informal basis and gained considerable expertise in managing the pond.

In 2010, largely for health and safety reasons, Richmond Council decided that a more formal arrangement should be negotiated with the volunteers. After a series of meetings with the Council, the Friends of Kew Pond was formed, a constitution was adopted and a management plan and filling protocol were agreed. Since then, more volunteers have come forward and there is a regular group who open and close the valve into the river every month. Volunteer work days are held twice a year in the spring and autumn when the reed beds are cut back, rubbish is removed and the fallen leaves are swept up. Powdered chalk is added to the pond during these work days to inhibit the growth of algae by balancing the ph factor. This year (2017), the Trust for Conservation Volunteers will come in over a two week period in early October and a major clean up will take place. The pond will be emptied, the reed beds will be cut back and the silt on the bottom will be thinned out. This work will be funded by Richmond Council. The last major clean up took place in 2007 and the phragmites reeds and flag irises, both very invasive species, now need to be drastically culled.

Kew Pond, as we know it today, is designated as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation and it provides habitat for a variety of water fowl, including swans, mallards, crested ducks, coots, moorhens, pochards and occasionally more exotic visitors such as mandarin ducks and Egyptian geese, as well as invertebrates including dragon flies and damselflies. It is enjoyed by young and old alike who stop to admire and feed the ducks.