

# The Ballad of the Crane

A selection of poetry inspired by the Crane compiled by Martyn Day



“I may observe that the man who delights in a quiet lazy ramble by all sorts of short cuts and byways will see some unpretentious scenery upon a stream whose praises, I believe, have hitherto been unsung, and even unnoticed...”

“The Crane? Never heard of it!” I wonder how many will make this remark? Yet there are a dozen views along its course well worth a picture.”

*The Way About Middlesex H.S. Vaughan 1893*

I sometimes wonder myself how many people living in St Margarets today actually know about the River Crane. Although it runs right through our neighbourhood it is hidden and out of sight, lost behind fences and hedges, tucked away at the bottom of gardens and buried under bridges and culverts. So for all those ignorant of our own local river, let's return to basics and H.S Vaughan's 1893 book, "The Way about Middlesex"



“The Crane rises near Headstone Farm near Pinner; thence it follows a winding course. South of Ickenham it turns southward and is known as the Yeading Brook. Beyond here it dodges about among two big canals, the Paddington and the Grand Junction, passes through Cranford Park to Cranford Bridge, turns up again at Bedfont Powder Mills and those of Hounslow, and so comes down to Twickenham- by that time quite a respectable size... It is at Isleworth that the Crane enters the Thames by two mouths, (one artificial). One in the centre of the old village close to the church and the other just above the eyot, north of the R.N School at St Margarets.”

Although it is a modest stream, in its time the Crane has attracted the attention of many writers and poets. One of the earliest references came in about 1549 from the topographer John Leland. He wrote..

“There runneth a Land Water through the Hethe of Hundeslawe as a Drene to the whole Hethe, that is of great cumpace, and I passed by a bridge of Tymore over it.”

Although Leland did not actually name the river it is thought that his ‘bridge of Tymore’ is probably Babers Bridge which takes the Staines Road over the Crane.

By 1870 the poet Wetenhall Wilkes was able to wax a little more lyrical as he describes the Crane as it passes through Cranford Park.

“Before the front a swelling river glides,  
A lofty bridge bends o’er its rising sides.  
A sinding vale the peaceful flood receives,  
And here the stream its glassy bosom heaves.”

A few years further on and in 1907 A.R Hope Moncrieff added a short description of the river in his book “Middlesex”...

“The Yeading Brook waters a stretch where itself seems the pleasantest feature. Here comes another of those odd blanks in the map of Middlesex, a flat of sodden green, looking wrapped up in November mist, through which loom sodden farmhouses, but it is else so unpopulated that only one road runs across it. Bold explorers might find a touch of adventure in trespassing against notices which block approach to that devious brook, over a country of such agricultural note that it is not to be sneezed at unless by sufferers of hay fever. The Yeading Brook, further down promoted to the title of the Crane River, should have observance as the largest stream belonging to Middlesex. It rises in two forks on the slopes above Harrow, and after flowing right across the county has two mouths into the Thames, one with the by-name of Isleworth River.”

Many of those ‘odd blanks in the map of Middlesex’ have now been filled in by the creeping suburbs of which St Margarets is but one.

In 1895 another poet, Clifford Harrison, had a crack at writing up the Crane in his poem about Fulwell Park...

“A Thames in miniature, it winds its way  
Secure from public view. The very spot  
Wherein to dream the livelong day!  
A yet why dream in spot so fair? Ah nay,  
Open your eyes! Dream where you will, but not  
Beside the Colne.”

Of course the river that he is writing about is most certainly not the Colne. That particular stream goes nowhere near Fulwell. Harrison’s poetic “Thames in miniature” is the Crane, which does pass through Fulwell. In riparian terms our Clifford is truly up the creek.

So let’s not leave it to obscure Victorian writers who do not know their Colne from their Crane. Let us, the inhabitants of St. Margarets and riverside folk all, celebrate, remember and preserve our half forgotten, tucked away, rarely mentioned little waterway... Now where’s my pen?

I love my little garden where the Crane flows at the bottom  
When the sun is shining it is truly God's demesne  
But when the tide is high and the floodwaters start rising  
It's then I find my garden at the bottom of the Crane.

*Hal Eburton-Roade 2010 — from Martyn Day*