



*Posted on June 13, 2020 by Lara*

## Harmondsworth Moor – A Rural Idyll under a Flightpath

I'm always on the lookout for new places to walk my dog. I have the attention span of a toddler and crave novelty. I am also an inveterate picker-upper of leaflets and at my library I took some about the Colne Valley Trail. I had been to some of the places before but hadn't been to Harmondsworth Moor nor heard of it.



Harmondsworth is an ancient village and was listed in the Domesday Book as Hermodsworde. There has been evidence found there of Iron Age huts and a Saxon Village. The parish church and the Great Barn survive from medieval times. It's the largest medieval barn to have

survived intact. After years of neglect it was rescued by English Heritage, is Grade I listed and was dubbed the “Cathedral of Middlesex” by Sir John Betjeman.



The land around was once part of Hounslow Heath and was steadily enclosed from the 1750s. The village grew slowly but did not change significantly until the nearby Colnbrook Bypass opened in 1929. This brought more housing and commercial sites such as Penguin Books. The development of Heathrow Airport after 1945 changed the whole area.



The moor was formerly used for gravel pits and landfill. I only realised this when researching its history, it's so well done that you wouldn't guess. It was established in 2000 by British Airways and this reclaimed land is meant to be the biggest public park created in London in the last 100 years. It was planted with 70,000 trees, landscaped and managed for wildlife and public recreation. Some paths are for walking and cycling and others are bridleways. The parkland contains meadows, rivers, lakes and ponds. Meandering paths take you through open countryside, riverside paths and woodland. It would be quite easy to get lost so make sure you download or print a map before going – there are plenty of walks to choose from online. Or use your GPS on your phone if you have it.

## Colne Valley Park Harmondsworth Moor walk



I went twice in one week – both idyllic May days nearing Whitsun – and it was so beautiful and peaceful. You could hear the motorways nearby but at this time there are fewer cars and planes than normal. There are wide open places and also shaded woodland walks by streams. The oxeye daisies covered the gentle hillsides and reminded me of the tellytubby landscape. It is very easily accessible from the A4 and there are free car parks too and some street parking at weekends.

There are three waterways on the site, the Colne, the Wraysbury and the Duke of Northumberland. The Colne is the only one of the three which is a naturally occurring river, with the other two being canals dug in the sixteenth century to power local mills and to feed the ornamental ponds at Syon House. I saw some fish there too and beautiful reeds gently moving in the current.







Apart from the lovely natural surroundings there are some interesting historical markers. Past Half Moon Meadow there is a memorial to a Royal Canadian Air Force bomber that crashed there in 1948 killing all seven crew members. The plaque is set in a block of stone from Waterloo Bridge and every year a small memorial service is held – the wreaths were still there. Some more of these stones from Waterloo Bridge (demolished in 1935) are scattered throughout the park – particularly in an area known as the Keyhole. A requirement for the park when being created was that everything on the site would have to stay there so these stones remain.



The second time I went I parked in a different place and only at the very end of our walk did I see places I recognised, it's that big (3,480 acres or 14 square km.) I feel I have only seen the tip of the iceberg and I was intrigued by some overgrown paths too.

I've read that it is at its best in July and August when the fields are full of poppies and corn marigolds so I will definitely return.