

## Water Conduits in Richmond Park

by Max Lankester

A 'conduit' in this context means a small building, typically built from brick or stone, which served to protect a spring and to collect the water for the supply of a nearby building. They could equally be called 'well houses'.

The best known in Richmond Park is White Conduit, situated at the edge of Conduit Wood. This is the only surviving structure that appeared on the pre-enclosure maps of the 1630s. Fire had destroyed most of Shene Palace in 1497, and when Henry VII rebuilt it a year or two later he had the conduit constructed so pipes carried fresh water down the hill to the palace, which Henry re-named Richmond. By the time that Charles I enclosed his New Park, the structure had already been in existence for about 135 years.

The photograph above shows the present, rather unprepossessing appearance of the White Conduit and one can see why it is sometimes mistaken for an air-raid shelter. Originally, it would almost certainly have been quite a tall building, similar to the Gallows



and Coombe conduits on Coombe Hill. The map-maker who was surveying the area for King Charles in the early 1630s depicted a tall building with a pitched roof – quite unlike what is there now.

Also readily visible within the Park, just below the path between Richmond Gate and Pembroke Lodge, is an igloo-like brick building that is often mistaken for an ice-house. It is in fact an 18th century artesian well house into which flowed water from several springs. The water was channelled to a succession of mansions in Petersham Park and after the demolition of the last mansion in 1835 the water may have been diverted to supply Russell School, established in 1851 near Petersham Gate by the Russell family of Pembroke Lodge.

The third conduit, about which less is known, lies a few metres north-east of White Ash Lodge. It looks like a mini version of White Conduit, and would have channelled water to the Lodge. Interestingly, there are two wells within the Lodge itself, one of which is in the former brewing house.

