

With thanks to John Brown, Local History Publications and Mark Berry at the Streatham Society.

This is just one of Thames Water's historic sites. To find out more about the others, visit [thameswater.co.uk/livewild](https://www.thameswater.co.uk/livewild)



Streatham Pumping Station

A historic pumping station



Streatham Wells

Natural mineral springs were discovered at Streatham Common in 1659. Great claims were made for the medicinal qualities of these waters, and the area became a popular spa town in the 18th century. Drinking water was also obtained from nearby wells. But as Streatham's population rapidly expanded, additional water supplies were needed by the late 19th century.

Drilling the well and borehole at Streatham began in 1881 and was completed in 1888, and the well was brought into use in 1890.

Even though the water-level is about 45 feet from the surface, boring continued to a depth of 1,271 feet. This made it possible for about 2,000,000 gallons of water to be obtained from the well on a daily basis.

The water is pumped by two double-acting lift pumps driven by two sets of triple-expansion engines, and the steam is generated by three Badcock and Wilcox boilers.

Streatham Water Treatment Works



The history of the pumping station

The very first pumping station was constructed in 1881 and housed in a corrugated iron shed. The location was chosen primarily because of the huge natural reserves of water beneath the site, but also because of its rural location and closeness to the railway line. This allowed easy transportation of coal to power the pumps needed to bring water to the surface.

In 1894 Streatham Pumping station was built by the Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company, to serve the rapidly expanding suburb of Streatham. It was built above the original well at a cost of £13,489. It might have been even cheaper and a very different building if it wasn't for the freeholder, Mr Thompson.

He was conscious that the original iron shed had been an eyesore and negatively impacted on the value of his adjacent land holdings. He therefore made a planning condition that the new pumping station should be of an ornamental design and be subject to his approval. So it's him we have to thank for the building we see today.

In 1903 Streatham Pumping station became part of the publicly owned Metropolitan Water Board. It originally consisted of two steam-driven engines. Each was capable of delivering 1 ½ million gallons a day from the well into a 42 inch main through which water was then supplied to customers. These two steam pumps were then replaced in 1943 by electrically driven pumping machinery.

Over the subsequent years, the yield from the well deteriorated until it was no longer economically viable to use it as a supply source. But that's not to say the pumping station fell into disuse. The equipment actually proved to be invaluable as a booster pump between the mains and Norwood Reservoir.

Thames Water Ring Main

In the 1980s the building was adapted as one of 11 pumping stations serving the Thames Water Ring Main, providing half of London's water supply. The massive £250m project involved digging an 8ft diameter tunnel over 100ft deep and 50miles long around London. It's large enough to accommodate a London taxi cab and covers an area of 580 square miles.

As part of this project, Streatham pumping station underwent a £300,000 refurbishment and restoration.

The ring main is actually the longest tunnel in Britain. It's almost twice the length of the Channel Tunnel and is considered to be one of Britain's greatest engineering achievements of the 20th century, as well as being one of its best kept secrets.

It was even completed within budget and nearly two years ahead of schedule and was officially opened by the Queen in November 1994.



Architectural design

Streatham Pumping Station was designed by James William Restler, M. Inst. C.E., an engineer to the Southwark and Vauxhall Waterworks company. Construction of the pumps was believed to have been completed by Messrs. James Watt, and The Bedford Lemere daybook records the Holloway Brothers as building an ornate pumping station at Streatham.

Streatham Pumping House was built in the style of the day, with a domed and turreted neo-Byzantine pumping house and tall brick chimney stack in the form of a campanile. It is now a Grade II listed building.

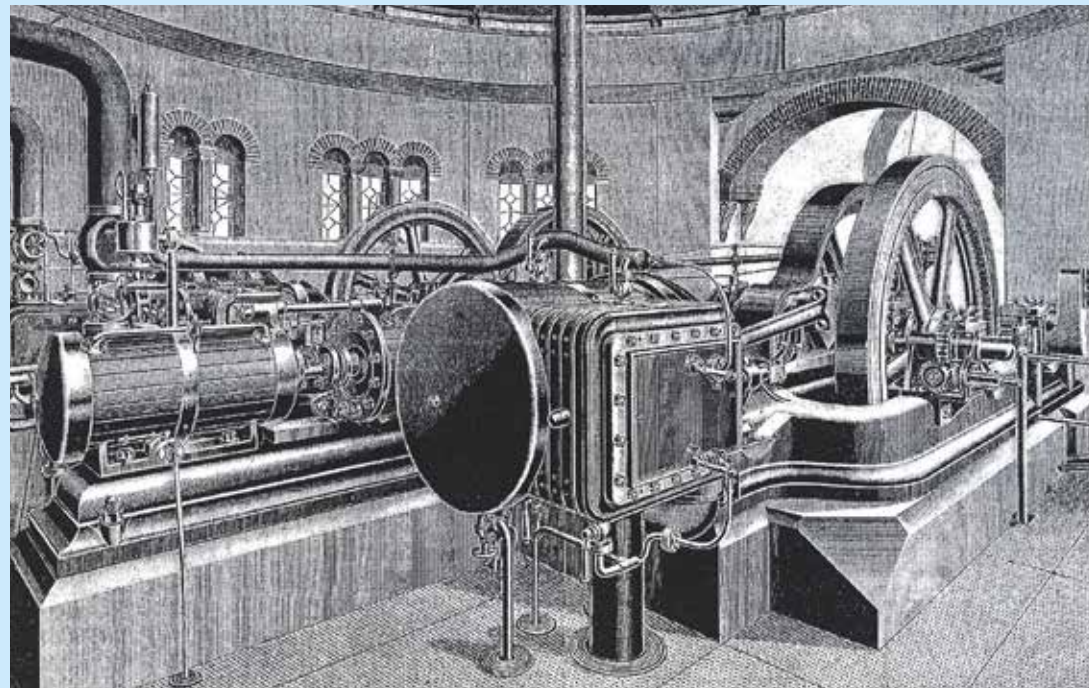
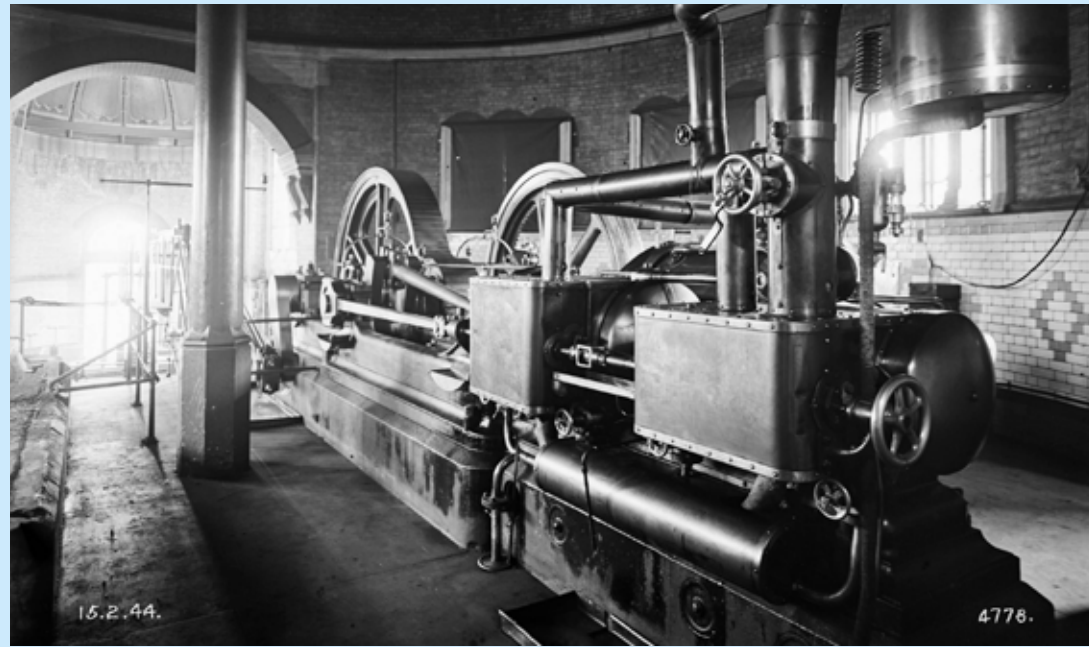
The walls and railings that surround the site and the southernmost of the two gates are contemporary with the pumping station and in a similar style and using the same materials as the main building. The northernmost gate was probably built later, as it does not appear on early maps, but is still in the same style and in keeping with the rest of the site.

The Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company

The Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company was incorporated in 1845 and formed by the merging of two rivals, the Southwark and Vauxhall Water Companies. In the early days of the company, a good deal of money was lost through its adoption of wooden pipes for the distribution of water, until it finally changed over to iron ones.

Originally the company took its water supply from the Thames at Battersea, until the Metropolitan Water Act of 1852 forced it to move upstream to Hampton in 1855.

At their Battersea location, The Southwark and Vauxhall Water company was used by John Snow as a comparator with the Lambeth Waterworks Company, who had moved their source upstream, to cleaner Thames Ditton. In what became known as 'the grand experiment', Snow studied cholera deaths in the epidemic of 1853-4, when some neighbours were unknowingly receiving cleaner water from the Lambeth company while others consumed more polluted water from The Southwark and Vauxhall company.



The pumping engine at Streatham Station.

With thanks to John Brown, Local History Publications and Mark Berry at the Streatham Society.

This is just one of Thames Water's historic sites. To find out more about the others, visit thameswater.co.uk/livewild



Streatham Pumping Station

A historic pumping station

