# Coulsdon Art Trail

**By Charles King**

The two latest finials on the Coulsdon Art trail were installed over the Christmas holiday period. The first one is the **Woolly Mammoth** which is installed on the finger pole on the Brighton Road adjacent to the steps leading to Coulsdon South Station.



Around 100,000 BC Woolly Mammoths and Hippopotami were among the prehistoric animals roaming the region around Coulsdon.

When the London and Brighton Railway were constructing the Quarry (fast) Line avoiding Redhill through the grounds of Cane Hill Coulsdon. On the 20th January 1897 the skeleton of a Woolly Mammoth was discovered some 40 feet below the surface. The skeleton was exhumed and was presented to the Horniman Museum in South London.

The second finial is a tribute to the **Irish and Yorkshire Navigators** and is in the new Community Garden at Coulsdon South station. The navigators who constructed the cuttings by hand between Coulsdon and Merstham Tunnel along with the tunnel as well. The Brighton line between Croydon and Brighton was approved by an Act of Parliament in 1836, to connect with the existing London and Croydon railway running from London Bridge to West Croydon. Construction south of Croydon began in 1838.



The section of line from Coulsdon to Merstham was laid over parts of its predecessor, the Surrey Iron Railway one of Britain's first public railways which used horses drawn wagons. Sections of the Surrey Iron Railway can still be seen at the back of Lion Green car park, and to the south of Hooley adjacent to the A23.

There were over 700 navigators employed on this section of the railway and they were housed in a makeshift camp just outside Merstham where the resident population was also round 700 at the time.

To keep the navigators fed and watered on the Merstham dig, boys were employed to bring barrels of beer in wheelbarrows from local pubs. They managed to get through so much beer that the it was supplied by pubs from as far away as The Woodman in Woodmansterne.

The line between Coulsdon South and Merstham tunnel is in a deep cutting 90-foot deep at its deepest point at Hooley prior to the mile-long Merstham tunnel, one of five tunnels on the line. The first local station to open in 1841 was Stoats Nest on the site of Stoats Nest Farm with three trains per day.



Woodplace Lane Cutting



Merstham Tunnel

Latest Finials on Coulsdon Art Trail is our contribution to Rail 200 see page ** There are now 12 Finials on the Coulsdon Art Train between Coulsdon South station and the town centre. Their location can be found on the ECRA web site www.eastcoulsdon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/COULSDON-ART-TRAIL-P1-Jan-24.pdf