

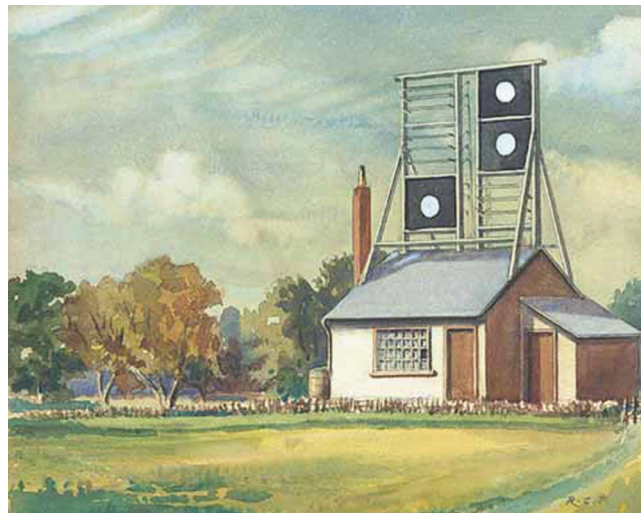


History of Putney Heath and the Telegraph

The Telegraph was named after Admiralty Telegraph, a shutter station which stood at the site in 1796 to convey messages between London and Portsmouth at the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

Long before the electric telegraph came on the scene, a method of communication existed that relied on using relay stations connected by line of sight. This was no new idea as a similar system was used by the Romans to communicate from hilltop to hilltop.

The system was set up by the Admiralty in the early 19th century in order to communicate quickly between their London headquarters and various naval ports. The line from London to Portsmouth operated from 1824 until December 1847 when it was superseded by the electric telegraph. It ran over 72 miles and cost latterly between £3,000 and £3,500 a year to work. In addition to this substantial sum, it was allegedly only fully operational for one-fifth of the year; being interrupted regularly by fog, rain and even by gloomy weather. The Admiralty semaphore was abandoned at the end of 1847.



The Admiralty Signalling Station at Telegraph Clump, near Blandford Camp.

The system was simply 6 circular shutter discs controlled by ropes from within the hut, where men were continuously on watch using spy-glasses (telescopes). By pivoting individual shutters a large variety of different combinations could be obtained, depending on which shutters exposed their face. The operators would not need to know the message but merely to relay the signal which was then decoded at the receiving end.

This was the time of the Napoleonic Wars and defence was important against fleets using the North Sea and the Baltic. The first official message was sent via the new telegraph in 1808 when the Admiral based in Yarmouth reported to the Admiralty in London “Calypso ready for sea”.

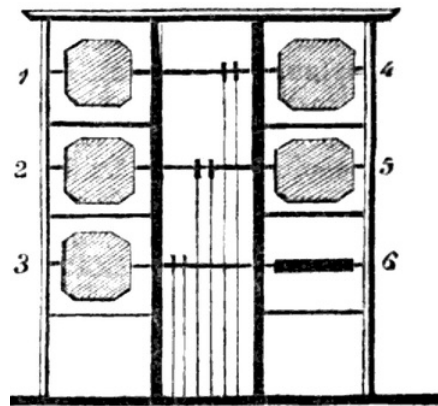
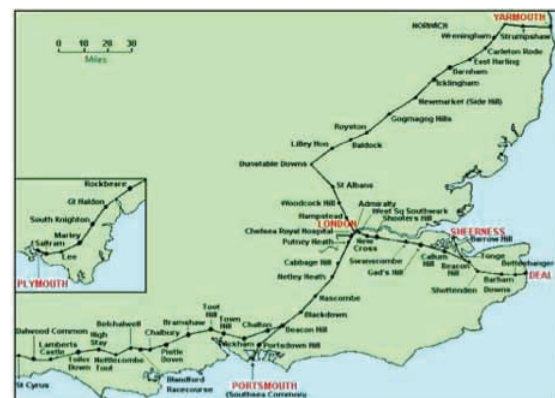


Diagram of UK Murray six-shutter system with shutter 6 in the horizontal position and shutters 1-5 in vertical.



Admiralty Shutter Telegraph Simplified Alphabet Code.

The letter combinations are as the observer at the next station would read them.



This map shows the route of the early Shutter Telegraph.

The History of Putney Heath

Putney Heath is one of three open spaces, along with Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common, that are legally protected from being enclosed or built upon by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Act of 1871.

The Telegraph was once in the middle of the Heath but now is close to the A3 which has cut the Heath into two.



The Telegraph Pub 1900.

The area was a rendezvous for highwaymen. One of the most notorious, Dick Turpin, is rumoured to have hidden his guns in an upstairs room at the Green Man just down the way and Jeremiah Abershaw was arrested there in 1795. He was executed at Kennington and his body was hung in a chain gibbet on the Heath as a warning to others.

The Heath became popular in the 17th century among gentry with a score to settle and many duels were fought near the Green Man. The Duke of Buckingham killed the Earl of Shrewsbury in 1667 with one stroke of his sword, leaving the Duke free to continue to lavish his affections on Lady Shrewsbury. It was in 1798 when William Pitt the Younger, then Prime Minister, and William Tierney MP chose to resolve a disagreement over a Parliamentary Bill by facing each other with pistols on the Heath. Both missed their targets and survived, perhaps to settle their differences over a stiff drink in the Telegraph.

A stone and brick obelisk was erected on Putney Heath in 1770, marking the 110th anniversary of the Great Fire of London, to coincide with the invention of the Hartley fire plates by David Hartley (the Younger), near a spot where his fireproof house, Wildcroft Manor, was built. The obelisk, with ornately detailed foundation stone, is still standing and can be accessed via our car park, off Wildcroft Road. The lower part of Wildcroft Manor was repeatedly set on fire in the presence, among others, of George III and Queen Charlotte. Since 1955 the obelisk has been a Grade II listed building.



The obelisk on Putney Heath and the inscriptions on the panels around the base.

The history of Manor Fields is closely linked to that of Putney Heath. It is a preserved tract of common land north of Wimbledon Common which began more than a thousand years ago as a village in Surrey and grew into the thriving town of Putney in Greater London. Manor Fields is built on the spot where Henry VIII's chief minister was born and in the grounds of an 18th-century manor house which gave the estate its name.

Like many towns and villages, Putney expanded during the Industrial Revolution with the arrival of the railways and improved roads. Putney station in the High Street opened in 1846, served by trains from Waterloo. The present Underground stations of Putney Bridge, which is across the Thames in Fulham, and East Putney, were opened in 1880 and 1889 respectively and were served by steam locomotives until electrification in 1905.



Putney High Street looking north in the 1950s. The two cinemas on the right have been replaced by a concrete building containing the Odeon.

The Telegraph Pub

We came across the Telegraph after its closure on New Years Day 2019. Until then it had been a lively pub describing itself as a 'country pub in the city'. Describing itself as a venue for parties and weddings, we thought it had huge potential and couldn't miss the opportunity to breathe new life back into it, restoring it to its rightful place at the heart of the local community.