

ETHEL AND ERNEST'S CIRCUIT OF SOUTHFIELDS

(4.5 miles, 50-60 minutes)

Thanks to these downloadable maps you can select your own short local history walk taking in significant features of interest in the **Tooting/Earlsfield/Wandsworth/Wimbledon** area. Summerstown182 **'Great Escapes'** are just the job for your daily exercise allowance! Even at a slow pace you can do each one in less than an hour. Ten flavours to choose from, every one a winner! **Perfect for mind, body and spirit.**



With no Wimbledon this year, this walk is a very good reason to go to Southfields and see what goes on in the fascinating area just a short stroll from the world famous tennis lawns. Its packed with interest and acting as your guides are 'Ethel and Ernest' the parents of Raymond Briggs, immortalised in his 1999 book and 2016 animated film. In 1930, 65 Ashen Grove was where they came to live and they would have been very familiar with a lot of the places we are going to visit.

1 START WIMBLEDON PARK UNDERGROUND STATION - The District Line came here on 3rd June 1889 turning this area upside down. Much of the development of Southfields dates from then. Before that, it was mainly open fields, a bit of market gardening, but very few inhabitants. Over the next twenty years much of the surrounding area was covered with houses. Start your tour by crossing Arthur Road and bearing left into Home Park Road, heading for Wimbledon Park.

2 Enter the park and take a moment to enjoy the magnificent view from the pavilion. This would have been a ten minute walk from Ashen Grove for young Raymond and his parents. In the film there are a number of scenes of them coming here when he was growing up. Wimbledon Park was home to the Spencer family who owned vast swathes of property in this area. During the 1760s, the park was landscaped by [Capability Brown](#), including the enlargement of an existing lake.

3 Cross the park, passing to the left of the tennis courts. You could divert further left to enjoy the lake or the Waterfall Garden, but the aim is to head for the Revelstoke Road entrance beneath the railway line on the far right hand side boundary. Either way, enjoy the green space as there are a lot of streets coming up. On the left hand side behind the trees is the athletics track, home of the Hercules Club. Next to this the grass is a mass of tents during Wimbledon Fortnight as people camp overnight to join the early morning queue for tickets. The Championships only came to their present location in 1922 and Fred Perry won the first of his three men's singles titles in 1934, the year Raymond Briggs was born.

4 Enter Revelstoke Road and turn first left at McCluskeys shop into Eisenham Road. You are working your way through the famous [Southfields Grid](#) - but don't expect to see any pubs. Landowner John Augustus Beaumont bought the estate when the Spencers ran out of money. His daughter Augusta who inherited when he died in 1893 was a member of the temperance movement and drew up a restrictive covenant when she sold the land for development. The last of the 1,766 houses, maisonettes and shops here was built in 1908. Two pubs were eventually added, but not till the 1990s.

5 Go left into Replingham Road. You are now in central Southfields with the underground station in front of you. For two weeks of the year Wimbledon Park Road to your left is thronged with tennis fans heading towards the courts. Follow it instead to the right and past the site of the old Lyceum cinema and 'Everyday' Church with its interesting selection of tablets set into the wall.

6 A possible diversion a little further down on your right is Standen Road, home to the beautiful art nouveau style 'Flourish and Nourish' Frame Foods baby food factory, dating from 1904. It now houses luxury apartments and is called 'Tiffany Heights'.

7 Take a left into Pulborough Road. Continue straight over Granville Road into Gressenhall Road and look out on your left for the distinctive dome of London's first mosque, inaugurated here in October 1926. The [Fazi Mosque](#) also known as the London Mosque was built by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and served as the international headquarters of this community until 2019.

8 Turn right into Melrose Road and continue as far as West Hill Road. There are lots of grand houses in this area and it has a very different feel from the Grid. Take the first right into Wimbledon Park Road. On your left hand side at No31 is Holly Lodge, home of [George Eliot](#) and where she wrote 'The Mill on the Floss' in 1859. Charles Dickens was entertained here and Eliot wrote of her love of the house in a number of letters. This was the first building in south London to receive an English Heritage blue plaque in 1905, and the first to be dedicated to a woman.

9 Turn left onto Granville Road then at the roundabout, go straight across into Brathway Road which will lead you into King George's Park. Originally Southfields Park, re-named after a visit from King George V in 1923. Go left but bear right to the other side of the park following the sign for the riverside path. Over to your left, curling

majestically across the park until it was demolished in 1967 was the [Wandsworth Storm Relief Aqueduct](#), built by Joseph Bazalgette. No trace of it remains but there are stunning photos online of urban guerillas exploring the sewers beneath it. Bazalgette lived in Arthur Road in later life and is buried in St Mary's Church.

10 Continue along the park boundary on the Wandle Trail. Cross Kimber Road passing the skateboard park on your right. Follow Foster's Way alongside the river until you come to a footbridge. Turn left across this and enter Lydden Road. Once a busy residential street, this was an area rich in [gypsy and traveller heritage](#). Ernest Redvers Briggs was born here in 1900. The houses are all gone, replaced now by light industrial units and the remains of factories from an earlier age such as Airfix on your immediate right. There is no trace of the road, full of horses and costermonger carts that young Ernest the milkman stepped out of in a scene in the film. The 1911 census lists a family of six children living at No8 with Ernest's father James working in the 'phonographic factory' almost certainly [Columbia Records](#) in neighbouring Bendon Valley. One of his brothers worked as a 'fat melter at the bone works', probably in the nearby horse-slaughtering yard. Another was a 'smith's mate at the ironworks'. Ernest's mother Rosa died in 1906 aged 39 and his father remarried the following year. Ethel was from Lewisham and the film shows how Ernest was embarrassed to take her to visit his humble roots. Their move a mile or so across the Wandle to Southfields was truly like stepping into a different world.

11 Return to the park and follow the path across it, past the Leisure Centre into Burr Road. Go left and follow the road round the corner past Southfields Academy. At Merton Road, before continuing to your left, look back on your right to see the handsome cream-tiled 'OK Sauce Factory', built in 1928. The Gardeners Arms and Earl Spencer pubs across the road from here give some clues to the local history.

12 Tucked behind Riversdale School on the other side of the road is Coronation Gardens, commemorating another royal visitor, this time Edward VII.

13 Back on Merton Road, just past the Royal Marines Barracks, look for a 1920s block of flats called Mastin House. This was named after the Captain of a collier boat owned by the Wandsworth Gas Company. The ['SS Wandle'](#) repulsed, possibly even sank a German U-Boat in 1916. The crew returned to a hero's welcome, with crowds lining the banks of the Thames and the story on all the front pages.

14 A little further on, cross over to St Barnabas Church on the corner of Lavenham Road. This was originally a 'tin tabernacle' whilst the houses in the Grid were being built up. It was eventually consecrated in 1908 with room for a congregation of 800 people. Go down Lavenham Road, then first left into Astonville Street. A high explosive bomb here in the early days of the Blitz destroyed a number of homes.

15 At the end of this turn right into Revelstoke Road. No33, currently with a bright red door was home to Theresa May and her husband when she was a Merton Councilor from 1986 to 1994. They later moved to Dora Road near Wimbledon Park.

16 Turn left into Durnsford Avenue, then right into [Ashen Grove](#). Named after a sweep of trees planted in Wimbledon Park by Capability Brown and subsequently a farm. Just after Wolseley Road, No65 is on your right. This Edwardian three-bedroomed terrace house is where Raymond Briggs was born in 1934, the son of a Ernest a milkman and Ethel a maidservant. They bought it for £850 in 1930. Ernest earned about £3 a week as a milkman, supplementing that with a bit of painting and decorating. Raymond went on to art college but didn't actually leave the family home until 1957. Ernest and Ethel both passed away in 1971.

17 Continue on Ashen Grove and turn left into Melrose Avenue. The second road on the left is Stroud Road. This was formerly Marlborough Road and a short distance down here, No14 on the right hand side was home to Pete Hampton and Laura Bowman, two American rag-time artists and musicians. They lived here from 1907-1909 along with Laura's parents and a Russian servant, naming the house ['Darktown Villa'](#) in honour of their group 'The Darktown Entertainers'. Pete and Laura were part of a wave of African-American musicians and performers who due to racism couldn't work in their own country but came to Europe in the Edwardian age. They were mentors to the young Sadie Crawford, the Tooting jazz pioneer.

18 Follow Melrose Road the short distance back to Wimbledon Park Station. The next road on your left, Ryfold Road is an amalgamation of George Ryan and Henry Penfold, two of the forty five different builders who worked on the Grid during the 13 years it took to construct.

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