

Summerstown 182
GREAT ESCAPES

'LADY BOUNTIFUL'S UPPER TOOTING' HISTORY WALK
 2.5 miles, (35-45 minutes)
 Start at **TOOTING BEC, UNDERGROUND STATION**



LADY BOUNTIFUL'S UPPER TOOTING (3 miles, 40-50 minutes)



Originally devised to help everybody through the lockdown, these great downloadable walks take in significant features of historical interest for you to enjoy in the **Tooting/Earlsfield/Wandsworth/Wimbledon** area. There are now multiple flavours of Summerstown182 'Great Escapes' to choose from, every one a winner! **Perfect for mind, body and spirit.**

Taking in three famous Tooting Churches, this glorious walk also covers the story of the not-so-famous Miss Eliza Jane Bell, a philanthropic recluse known as 'Lady Bountiful'. Inheriting a fortune from her father, she lived at Park Hill House a large mansion surrounded by ornamental gardens close to the present site of Ernest Bevin College. A deeply religious person she bequeathed many kindnesses to the people of Tooting but was also averse to progress or what she saw as less worthy pursuits. This Walk takes you through her estate and explores some of the stories and people who have populated the surrounding streets.

1 START TOOTING BEC UNDERGROUND STATION - Designed by Charles Holden and opened in 1926, this was formerly Trinity Road Station and Holy Trinity Church is a highlight of this tour. Take a while to orientate yourself here. Across the road is the beautiful Wheatsheaf pub. To your right St Anselm's Roman Catholic Church. Tooting Bec takes its name from the [Abbaye du Bec-Hellouin](#) in Normandy, which was granted lands here by William the Conqueror. Not far from Rouen, it is now once again a working monastery and well worth a visit. [St Anselm](#) was sent over to take charge and became Archbishop of Canterbury.

2 Set off in the direction of Tooting Broadway on Upper Tooting Road. This is the old Roman road of [Stane Street](#) which ran from London Bridge to Chichester. There is plenty of interest, Chatkara Restaurant on the left was once a bootmakers. Look out for the stunning ghost-sign at the bottom of Noyna Road. To your right on the corner of Fircroft Road was the [Classic Cinema](#), which opened in 1910, one of seven cinemas in the Tooting area. Topsham Road was home to snooker legend Jimmy 'Whirlwind' White. You will also pass allegedly the largest 'Chicken Cottage' in Europe.

3 On your left is the brutalist 'Balham Telephone and Labour Exchange' dating from 1939. Paul Merton famously worked here for seven years as a clerical officer. Stand on the corner of Brudenell Road and observe some of the buildings on the other side of the main road. Look for Nos 68-72 between a cream coloured shop and 'Cake Box'. These are the oldest surviving original buildings in the area, dating from the late 17th century. They are the legacy of a medieval village, possibly laid out by monks from Bec Abbey. A little beyond that is The King's Head pub, dating from 1621, rebuilt in 1896. On the corner of Beechcroft Road opposite, look out for a stone tablet with a daffodil flower design, acknowledging the work of [Peter Barr](#), the Rollisson family and the nurseries that were once in this area.

4 Take a left up the hill into Brudenell Road, named after Lady Brudenell-Bruce who financed the building of [All Saints Church](#) in 1906. No6 was the home of First World War hero, Gunner Herbert Darbyshire. His bravery in the [Nery Affair](#) in 1914 was rewarded with the Medaille Militaire. The artillery gun he helped defend is prominently displayed in [The Imperial War Museum](#). He died a year later at Gallipoli.

5 All Saints Church is renowned for its acoustics and stunning interior. It was referred to as 'The Cathedral of South London' by the poet John Betjeman. Artists who have recorded here include Pavarotti, Kiri Te Kanawa and Paul McCartney chose it for his 'Tribute to Linda'. There are regular concerts and recitals.

6 Continue past the church and turn right into Franciscan Road. [Ruth Ellis](#), convicted of killing her lover David Blakeley in 1955 once lived here and also in Lucien Road. She was the last woman to be hanged in this country. It was only a few years before this that she lived in Tooting Bec and her children attended the local school.

7 Take the second right into Lessingham Avenue. This is part of the [Totterdown Fields Estate](#). Built between 1901 and 1911 as a pioneering garden estate, pleasant affordable homes where the working people flooding into the new suburb at the time could live. The street names also have a connection with Bec Abbey, being places in England where monastic cells were set up after the Norman conquest. The name Totterdown translates from saxon as 'look-out place on the hill'.

8 Continue down the hill and take a left into Ruislip Street. A nurse's house at No16 is indicated by a green heritage plaque. It was famously visited by royalty in 1903 as part of a celebration of the tram line being extended to Tooting.

9 Go right into Cowick Road then down into Upper Tooting Road. The development on the site of the old Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society, [RACS Building](#) in front of you is in full swing. Turn right and cross the road in front of the Pooja shop. Continue to your right, then turn left into Ansell Road. The large building on the other side of the road is now Balham Mosque and Tooting Islamic Centre. Previously it was the Mayfair Cinema. Original plans to build a cinema here were quashed by the disapproving Lady Bountiful so it wasn't completed until the 1930s. It closed in 1979 and for a while was home to the Bank of Baroda.

10 Cross to the other side of Upper Tooting Road. A Tesco store marks the site of another Lady Bountiful landmark. This was originally an ancient inn called The Bell. Eliza Jane brought it and converted it into the alcohol-free 'Bell Coffee Palace'.

11 Another grand house on Miss Bell's estate was Park Holme, once on the left hand side between Ansell and Hebdon Roads. An original moated manor dating

from the early 18th century, she turned it into a home for 'needy gentlewomen'. A Roman brick floor was reportedly discovered during its demolition in 1924. In the early 16th century this area was also the site of a medieval archery field.

12 Continue up Ansell Road crossing Fishponds Road which gets its name from a medieval moat system which survived as a series of 'ponds'. The largest of these is now the site of [Fishponds](#) playing fields. Turn right into Beeches Road and follow that round the bend. All the houses here were built in the 1920s on the beautiful ornamental grounds of the Park Hill estate. The name lives on in Park Hill Court, a block on the corner. Lady Bountiful wanted her estate to be preserved as a public park but the area was already well-served and housing needs were more pressing.

13 On the left at the end of Morven Road as you enter Glenburnie Road, an unusual house with a tall chimney dating from the 1860s was one of the original gatehouses of the Park Hill estate. Look for Gateside Road on the right, the original Park Hill House mansion was in this area. The Bells moved here in the 1850s, Lady Bountiful's father Alexander having made his fortune selling corn in the Crimean War.

14 Follow Glenburnie Road to the right, then left into Beechcroft Road. A short distance further on you will come to Ernest Bevin College. There has been a school here since 1926. Named after a leading light in Attlee's post-war government and MP for Wandsworth, it is one of the best-loved schools in this area. Among its former pupils are Sadiq Khan, Lennie James, Oris Deley and Marc Bolan. In 1985 ['Naz' Bokhari](#) became the first Muslim headteacher of a British secondary school.

15 After the school, look for Wandle Road, the third road on your right. The prosperous homes here in what was once known as 'Upper Tooting' have a distinctly different character from those down the hill in 'Lower Tooting'. Look on your right for 'Old Farm' and 'Burlington Court'. Turn left into Trinity Road and at No190 on your left is a block where [David Lloyd-George](#), Prime Minister of this country in the First World War. He was resident in this area between 1900-1908 here and also at a house on Routh Road near Wandsworth Common.

16 Cross Trinity Road and turn right into Brodrick Road, on the corner at 172 Trinity Road is a house where [Thomas Hardy](#) once lived between 1878 and 1881 whilst working as an architect. He was recently married and his job at the time was helping exhumed bodies from St Pancras Cemetery for a new railway line.

17 Brodrick Road leads you down to St James's Drive. On the opposite side of the road was the site of St James's Hospital, closed in 1988. It was demolished in 1992 and a modern housing estate was built a few years later. Divert briefly to the left and just inside one of the entrances is a plaque placed here two years ago by the [Nubian Jak Trust](#) in honour of [Daphne Steele](#). She was the first person of African heritage to be appointed a matron of a British hospital. She trained and worked here in the 1960s. A little further on opposite here at No89 was the childhood home of puppeteer and animator [Gordon Murray](#), creator of the much-loved children's TV shows 'Trumpton' and 'Camberwick Green'.

18 Turn around and continue down St James's Drive and back onto Trinity Road. Ahead you will see the recently restored tower of Holy Trinity Church. Just before the church, on your left, you will pass the old police station at No76 and across the road Tooting Fire Station dating from 1907. Before then, this was the site of 'The St Nicholas' Home for Crippled Children' established by the Waifs and Strays Society in 1887 following a campaign to provide care for children with physical disabilities, linked to Queen Victoria's golden jubilee celebrations.

19 [Holy Trinity Church](#) dates from 1855 and has a famous 'open door' policy and works closely with local charities and community groups. This tradition goes back to its early years when it helped distribute coal to the needy and organised a soup kitchen in Selkirk Road. One of the first church wardens was William Rollisson of the famous Tooting Nursery and the tower has many distinctive floral decorations. The war memorial features [Mary Cawston Bousfield](#), a nurse from Elmbourne Road who served in France for the entirety of the war and died of influenza in 1919. The Church was attended by 3,500 people for a Harvest Festival in 1895. As attendances declined and with funds needed for repairs, in 1976 the church hall in Glenburnie Road was sold to raise finance. A new hall was ingeniously converted out of the church's south aisle.

20 Just past the garage on the left are Holderness and Chetwode Roads. This area was heavily blitzed in 1940, accounts of which were noted in a diary by local teenager Colin Perry. This later turned into a book [The Boy in the Blitz](#). Alfred Butt House stands on the site of the worst damaged area. Most closely associated with the Victoria Palace theatre, [Alfred Butt](#) was a theatrical impresario and MP for this area in the 1920s. Local residents were regularly invited to attend his West End shows. Curiously this last stretch back to the station has very little modern development and is full of character. On the corner facing the station is The Wheatsheaf pub where in 1802 plans were hatched for the construction of The Surrey Iron Railway - another walk for another day..

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