



'FRANKIE GOES TO COLLYWOOD' HISTORY WALK

3 miles, (50-60 minutes)
Start at **COLLIERS WOOD, UNDERGROUND STATION**



FRANKIE GOES TO COLLYWOOD (3 miles, 50-60 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/Merton** area. There are now multiple flavours of Summerstown182 'Great Escapes' to choose from, every one a winner! **Perfect for mind, body and spirit.**

This walk is a celebration of all those who worked on the River Wandle and made it a brighter, more colourful place. A champion of these was **Francis Kitz**, a dyer and activist who dedicated his life to improve the working conditions of others at the expense of his own. In partnership with 'Made in Merton' we will be commemorating him with a **blue plaque**. When Kitz moved to Merton to work for **William Morris** his speeches and activities had already marked him out. He moved around a lot as the police were watching him. This walk passes some of those addresses as it follows the Wandle through a largely industrialised stretch of retail park. In the midst of it all once stood the great monastery of **Merton Priory**, making this probably south London's most significant heritage site. Throw in **Horatio Nelson**, **The Beatles**, cash from the **Great Train Robbery** and the building once voted the ugliest in the capital and you've got quite a tour...

1 START COLLIERS WOOD UNDERGROUND STATION - In front of you is the towering **Britannia Point**, the latest incarnation of a controversial and unpopular building with a troubled history. Spruced up recently and looking a look better, it was once the HQ of Ronnie Lyon's empire. A flamboyant cigar-chomping self-made businessmen whose mantra was 'every salaried man is a slave'. Starting out making garden sheds, he had a chauffeur by the age of fifteen and is credited with inventing the industrial estate - very appropriate as you will see a few today. His wife Hazel was known to walk around with a pet cheetah on a lead. His business went bust in the mid-70s property crash with £50 million of debts. Lyon Tower has also been known as The Vortex and the 'Brown and Root Tower' when owned by an American oil company.

2 A century before Ronnie Lyon, **Francis Kitz** came to this area to work for **William Morris** in around 1885. Continue on the High Street past the tower with two Kitz locations coming up. Next to the Holiday Inn across the road were Clare Villas. Burger King, just past the 'Kiss Me Hardy' pub was the site of 4 Barnes Cottages. The 1891 census shows Frank and Annie Kitz here with their eight children, living almost directly opposite the Six Bells public house. Kitz's neighbour was the Paris family among whom Catherine was a carpet knitter for Morris. A few door along were the Harris family who owned the dairy with daughter Mabel also a carpet knitter for Morris. Go up the steps of Burger King and bearing right, follow the path around it and cross a bridge. You are now deeply immersed in 900 years of history on all sides so take your time to soak it all in. Cross the Pickle Ditch with the walls of Merton Priory dating back to 1114 on your left. Ahead, submerged beneath the monolithic Sainsbury's 'Savacentre' is the site of the **William Morris Printworks**. Further to the left were watercess beds. To your right, across the road to the left of the bus garage, is the site of the King's Head inn that Nelson set off from on his way to Trafalgar. Its a lot to comprehend.

3 Morris took over the works here in 1881 and commuted from Hammersmith. He set up dye vats, printing-tables, looms for carpets and tapestries, and a stained-glass workshop. He made it a pleasant place to work. Kitz, already known to Morris through his politics was fortunate to be here when it was at its peak. After Morris' death in 1896 things were never quite the same though it carried on at this site until 1940.

4 Follow the path alongside the Wandle until the bridge. The dye house where Kitz worked would have been very close to this. Across the road, a barbers shop called 'Ed's', once 11 Merton Terrace, was the HQ of the **Merton Abbey Branch of the Socialist League** where Kitz was a regular speaker. 'Gourmet' Lebanese cafe a couple of doors along on the corner does the best kebabs I've ever tasted.

5 Bear left at the bridge and aim to go under the Sainsbury's complex, until 1982 the site of the Merton Board Mills paper factory. Aim for the underpass below Merantum Way, the elevated road, opposite the entrance to Marks & Spencer. This was built to preserve the site of the **Merton Priory Chapter House**. Overshadowed by a giant pylon, fast food chains and retail parks, it really is hard to believe this is such an important historical site. In the underpass, look for the visual of the Priory superimposed on a present-day setting and it will take your breath away. For 400 years this great Abbey was one of the largest, most influential monasteries in England. Linked to the origin of English Law and the likes of King John, King Henry VIII and Thomas Beckett. Its all relatively recently uncovered and is still unfolding.

6 Passing Pizza Hut and KFC, bear right and cross into **Merton Abbey Mills** with its market and crafts centre - this was the site of the Liberty Printworks which were here until the early 80s and many of the original buildings survive. Go under the archway and bear right aiming for the Wheelhouse with its working water wheel. Take the bridge over the Wandle and go right on the **Wandle Trail** path.

7 Cross a busy road, go through the gateway and left into Station Road passing a car wash directly into High Path. Again its hard to believe, but you are now entering the world of **Horatio Nelson**. The High Path Estate now sits on Merton Place, the landscaped mansion where Nelson and **Emma Hamilton** created their lovenest on a 150 acre estate purchased in 1801. After his death she was crippled with debts, it was sold off and demolished in 1817. Houses on what was known as 'Nelson's Fields' were badly bombed in WW2. The 1950s housing initiative is fading and its hard to equate how it is now with how it must have been in Nelson's time. A **major redevelopment** is underway so better times hopefully lie ahead. You may want to carry on along High Path to the St John the Divine Church built to celebrate the centenary of Nelson's death and its neighbouring memorial garden. The site of the Line Brothers, 'Triang Works', billed as **'The Largest Toy Factory in the World'** was also close by.

8 Alternatively cut down Pincott Road on your right just before the Trafalgar pub and head for Merton High Street. Turn right here following a path of trees along the edge of the estate. Look out for a small plaque on Doel Close indicating the precise location of **Merton Place** house very nearby.

9 A little further on, on the corner of Abbey Road is the Nelson Arms pub which marks the site of the entrance gates to Merton Place. Look for the beautifully glazed murals with scenes of Victory at the Trafalgar. Almost every road in this area has some kind of Nelson-related name and you can see the fierce pride it took in his legacy.

10 A little further on is Abbey Parade. No24 was the site of AW Cycles, sadly recently closed after 100 years of fixing up and selling bicycles. The story goes that they once laundered cash from the Great Train Robbery. Apparently a relative of one of the gang had a shop next door. Just past this was the site of **Wimbledon Palais**. The Beatles famously played a one-off concert for their fan club in December 1963. You can watch footage of it online. Beatlemania had hit home and the Fab Four had to play behind a cage to protect them from the mass of screaming teenagers. Newspaper headlines reported a riot with all police leave in Tooting and Mitcham cancelled. You need to cross the main road at some point here and look for for Norman Road, just after the Blue Cross Animal Hospital.

11 Go down Norman Road, heading straight over Gilbert Road and right into Deburgh Road. On the other side is the charming William Morris-styled 'Sultan' pub, well worth a visit. The Kitz family were living in this road at No97 between 1894 and 1900. Re-numbering has made things confusing but we think it may be the current No49. In 1897, 14 year old John Kitz was killed in an accident whilst working at Wimbledon station. Frank and Annie appear to have gone separate ways after this. There was a **gypsy encampment** in the area and the war poet Edward Thomas penned a vivid account of cycling down this road in his 1913 book **'In Pursuit of Spring'**. All Saints Church is a little to the north of the Sultan and the school on Haydens Road shows over 200 names lost in the First World War in this small area.

12 Turn left into Hanover Road then right into All Saints Road. Follow this round to the right where it curls into South Road. Ahead of you was the **Connolly Leather Factory**. Renowned for its Rolls Royce upholstery and covering the seats in both Houses of Parliament and on the Royal Yacht Britannia. In its previous guise it was one of the largest corn mills on the Wandle.

13 Turn right into Wandle Bank and pass alongside the river with **Wandle Park** on the other side. Near the bridge was the site of Wandle Bank House, once the home of James Perry, newspaper magnate and friend of Nelson. No5 Wandle Terrace was the first address the Kitz family lived at when they came to Merton in 1885. By 1888 they had moved to 23 Wandle Road on the other side of the bus garage.

14 Back onto Merton High Street, turn left past a Turkish restaurant, once The Six Bells, an ancient coaching inn patronised by King Edward VII on his way to the Derby, after which it became The Royal Six Bells. Wandle Park had a huge millpond where the playground is now and it is a much-loved green space. Just past this is Millers Mead, next to the Holiday Inn. Here at 3 Clare Villas, Kitz once ran the Merton Abbey Branch of the Socialist League, its official 'Clubhouse' also used for French classes.

15 The tour finishes at the **Charles Holden** pub, previously The Victory but re-named after the architect who designed so many of the Northern Line extension stations including the one across the road at **Colliers Wood**. Famous for his work on many First World War cemeteries and Senate House in Bloomsbury.

FOR INFORMATION AND MORE WALKS: summerstown182.wordpress.com  @summerstown182

If you enjoy your walk, please consider making a donation to CriticalNHS, sustaining local business by keeping the St George's frontline staff fed www.criticalnhs.org