



# 'THE HORSES OF GARRATT LANE' HISTORY WALK

3.5 miles, (50-60 minutes)  
Start at EARLSFIELD STATION,  
GARRATT LANE, SW18



- 1 Earlsfield Station
- 2 The Wandle of Earlsfield
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# THE HORSES OF GARRATT LANE (3.5 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** area. There are now multiple flavours of Summerstown182 'Great Escapes' to choose from, every one a winner! **Perfect for mind, body and spirit.**

**From the Young's shire horses delivering the brewery beer to those serving the factories and mills, from those working alongside the gypsies and costermongers to the cart horses pulling the trucks of the Surrey Iron Railway, Garratt Lane's story is entwined with the horse. Sadly many thousands of them ended their lives at one of London's largest slaughtering yards. This walk is a tribute to them all and the part they played in the development of one of south London's liveliest roads.**

**1 START EARLSFIELD STATION** - The railway line to Southampton first cut through here in the 1830s. The lands in the area were part of the All Farthing Estate, sold to the railway company by [Robert Davis](#). Earlsfield Road, authorised in 1878 was the first main artery. A new station opened for business on 1 April 1884. The age of the train did little to diminish the use of horses in London over the next 20 years. In 1890 there were half a million of them on the capital's streets, creating 1,000 tons of dung each day. It was a hard existence, the average life expectancy for a working horse was only around 3 years.

**2** Go under the bridge and you are on 'the other side of the tracks'. This was the rougher side of Earlsfield - until recently an area associated with unpleasant factories and workhouses. There were streets where policemen only went in pairs and where horses were kept in the front rooms of houses.

**3** On the other side of the road Thornsett Road runs into Groton Road, an old-world cul-de-sac, nestling alongside the railway line. That's now home to Banham Alarms and a popular old pub called The Country House. It was also one of the many addresses in the area where jazz pioneer [Sadie Crawford](#) once lived.

**4** The dramatic bend in the road here has a long history. A map from 1633 shows the field demarcation of Dunsfold Farm butting into this at a section called Willow Close. The course of the Wandale is much diverted from how it is presently. A passageway just before Vanderbilt Road marks the route of the [Surrey Iron Railway](#) on its route from Wandsworth to Croydon. It took no notice of the bend and cut straight through to Earlsfield station via Cargill, Algarve and Earlsfield Roads.

**5** Across the road from here, dating from the 1830's to 1928 stood a notorious horse-slaughtering business. Largely associated with the [Harrison and Barber](#) company who in 1893 were despatching 25,000 horses a year. No piece of the poor animal went to waste. Associated industries on site included a chemical manure factory and facilities for bone crushing, glue production and fat melting. Meat was set aside not just for cats and dogs, but also for human consumption. One of the most extraordinary features was a giant refrigerator capable of containing 250 horse carcasses. Accounts of the activity here date from the 1880s by which time streets of houses were being built and people were living close by. It must have been a grim spectacle, creating an unimaginable smell. There was even a theory that someone working at the yard was involved in the gruesome 'Thames Thorso' murder case of 1889 when dismembered body parts were found along the riverfront. Harrison Barber relocated in 1928 and for a few years Summerstown Football Club had their ground here.

**6** Cross the road now to get a close look at the [Henry Prince Estate](#), a flagship housing scheme consisting of 272 flats, opened in 1938. It was named after Henry Prince, who served as chair of the council's Housing Committee from 1919 to his death in 1936. Take note of the clock above the council's crest. It was here in the late sixties that Amanullah Khan, a qualified engineer who had served in the Pakistani Air Force settled with this young family and took a job driving the No44 bus down Garratt Lane. The family of ten lived in a three bedroom apartment. His son [Sadiq Khan](#) became the first Muslim mayor of a western capital city in 2015.

**7** You are now passing an area of astonishing productivity in the twentieth century. Haldane Place and Bendon Valley were the location of [Columbia Records](#), of Hunts Capacitors and the Airfix factory. [Aerial photos](#) show the extent of these enterprises and at the end of Bendon Valley you can see the last remains of the Airfix site. So many older people living around here have stories of a parent or a grandparent working at one of these places. Also in Bendon Valley was the Primrose Laundry.

**8** Sandwiched between two pubs, The Jolly Gardeners and The Grosvenor Arms are a small enclave of non-descript looking streets that punch above their weight in historical terms. Wardley Street, Lydden Road and Lydden Grove have a special place in gypsy/traveller history with many families descended from those who gathered here in their caravans from the 1880s. A 1633 map showing the fields of All Farthing manor indicates this area was called 'Horse Leaz'. Gypsies were documented in [Wandsworth](#) and Battersea from the 1860s with York Road providing a connecting point close to the Thames. One popular site was at Palmers Field near Wandsworth Bridge. Another was at Hill's Yard in Wandsworth Plain, now directly beneath Armoury Way. Perhaps pushed out of these more populated areas, the travellers sought sites a little further out like Wandsworth Common and Garratt Lane. There is a fascinating photographic record of a visit to the area before the First World War of [Galician gypsies](#) on their way from Spain to South America. A newspaper report from 1880 states that Henry Penfold and Thomas Mills built houses in Wardley Street after being summonsed for keeping a site here 'in a state of nuisance and injurious to health'. Before that this was one of many market gardens in the area which may have been an attraction to a community, many of whom worked as flower-sellers. Highlighted by [Charles Booth](#) as indicative of poverty and poor housing spreading down the Wandale Valley, it was described in

1905 as 'one of the worst slums in London'. A much kinder eye was cast upon it in a 1948 article in 'The Leader' magazine. Featuring George Matthews 'King of the Costers' and other hard-working families in this area, it showed a resilient, tight-knit community. These were people who got up at 4am to take their barrows into London and worked a 14 hour day. Some dealt in scrap and it's suggested that the creators of 'Steptoe and Son' got the idea for the hit TV show after a visit here. Much of the street was razed in the late 1950s. In the early 1970s, with pockets of waste ground undeveloped, travellers returned to an area which they knew they had a connection with. The Caravan Act of 1968 required councils to find them permanent sites and after much wrangling one was found half a mile away next to the Wandale on Trewint Street. The London Gypsies and Travellers organisation have created a very good [heritage mapping project](#) that people are encouraged to add their contributions to.

**9** On the other side of the road, the Anchor Church was one of many 'missions' who came to poorer areas in the late 19th century, in many cases to challenge the perceived rise of a drinking culture. They performed a vital social service to the area. There were other missions on Bendon Valley and Wardley Street. Just past this, the area behind the Brocklebank Health Centre was the site from 1886 of The [Wandsworth and Clapham Union Workhouse](#) with room for over 2,000 inmates.

**10** Just after this take a left into Kimber Road, then right into Twilley Street. Before it bends round to the right, look out for Foundry Place on the corner and Esparto Street to your right, echoes of past industries on the huge [Adkins Mill](#) site. Esparto was a type of grass used at William McMurray's paper mill. Cannons, shell and shot used at Trafalgar and Waterloo were produced at Henckell's iron mill. Turn left back onto Garratt Lane and just past All Farthing Lane is a classic [Young's](#) pub, The Old Sergeant. An ancient inn which would have done a great trade so close to the iron mill. Like any of those within a five mile radius of the brewery, they had their beer delivered by shire horses. This happened right up to the brewery's closure in 2006. There was no commercial sense in this but the directors saw the appeal of their animals, many of which were exhibited regularly at horse shows and became much-loved local personalities. In 1966 a horse called Steve got a lot of newspaper attention when he celebrated his 21st birthday having worked twice as long as the average cart horse.

**11** Continue down Garratt Lane and on the other side of the road is Earlsfield Boxing Club, home to many champions including most recently Olympic medalist Joe Joyce. Just along from that is Tir na Nog which was once The Horse and Groom pub and a workhouse in a previous life. Very close by was The Waggon and Horses, associated with The Surrey Iron Railway and recently reincarnated as The Garratt Tavern.

**12** Just past the Yellow Box Company, turn sharp left onto a path alongside the river. This wends its way through the old Adkins Mill site into King George's Park. Imagine the great curving [Storm Relief Aqueduct](#) which ran across this for nearly 100 years. Before the tower blocks and shopping centre this was the site of Wandsworth Stadium and until about twenty years ago a popular mini-hido called 'The Big Splash'.

**13** Turn left and follow the edge of the park alongside the huge mill site, in more recent times the [Benhams](#) kitchenware factory and also the Veritas factory producing gas mantles, one of many in the Wandsworth area employing a largely female workforce.

**14** Continue alongside the Wandale to Kimber Road and go straight across passing the skateboard park on your right. Carry on and take a left just after the stone tablet 'Foster's Way' memorial to [Corporal Edward Foster VC](#). Go over the bridge and turn right directly into the Henry Prince estate, heading for the arches on the right hand side which lead into St John's Drive. With the blue football cage on your right backing onto the presbytery of St Gregory's Church, this is as close as you can get to the location of the horse-slaughtering yard. You might not see any horses on this walk but they are there in spirit. Coming out alongside St John the Divine Church, try to imagine a report from the vicar here in 1890 complaining about the 'noxious odours' from the business operating next door.

**15** At another location on this site, close to the horse yard, three young women died and one was permanently disabled when a spark caused an explosion at Harry Cadwell's firework factory on 3 August 1888. Emotions ran so high at the funeral that 'many of the weaker sex had to be lead away'.

**16** Turn right onto Garratt Lane and pass the entrance to [St Gregory's Church](#). An extraordinary newsreel film from 1914 shows 4,500 mostly veiled celebrants attending an elaborate procession commemorating a martyred Catholic vicar, from Wandsworth, John Griffith Clarke. He was hung, drawn and quartered in Camberwell in 1539 for denying the supremacy of Henry VIII. St Gregory's Church was rebuilt in 1957 having been bombed twice in 1944, completely destroying the original building.

**17** Turn right into Duntshill Road and enter a treasure trove of interesting industries. The [Duntshill mill](#) that produced flock, parchment and paisley shawls. The Kenco Coffee factory and Corona soft drinks plant. The road swings round to the left where you cross the Wandale, then turn left into Penwith Road and cross it again.

**18** On the corner with Garratt Lane is the famous old Sailor Prince pub named after the largely unknown [Prince Alfred](#), second son of Queen Victoria who joined the Navy at the age of 12. He narrowly avoided death when shot by a fenian assassin whilst visiting Australia. Bear right here to head back to the station. A little further on from here, until not too long ago, on the corner of Trewint Street was Rawle & Son 'saddlery and riding shop' (now Bean and Hop). Many wondered how it possibly existed but perhaps it was some kind of tribute to The Horses of Garratt Lane...

FOR INFORMATION AND MORE WALKS: [summerstown182.wordpress.com](http://summerstown182.wordpress.com)  @summerstown182

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