



'ONE-WAY WANDSWORTH' HISTORY WALK

3.5 miles, (50-60 minutes)
Start at **WANDSWORTH TOWN HALL, WANDSWORTH HIGH STREET, SW18**



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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.**



The perfect accompaniment to [Wandle Riverside](#), this Walk explores the nightmare one-way system that from the mid-60s has besmirched central Wandsworth. Starting on the 'island' in front of the Town Hall, it crosses the Wandle Valley following the course of Joseph Bazalgette's Storm Relief Sewer. This handsome Victorian aqueduct starred in many an old photo and disappeared off the scene around the same time that the four lane gyratory came in. Thankfully the council has recently [announced a masterplan](#) so hopefully this too will soon be history!

1 START WANDSWORTH TOWN HALL - The enormous [Wandsworth Town Hall](#) was opened by Queen Mary in 1937. Take a moment to enjoy the friezes along its facade. If the Town Hall Gardens are open, a tablet in the left hand corner explains these historic representations of Wandsworth, Clapham, Streatham, Putney, Balham and Tooting life. You'll have fun trying to work out where they all are. In the Gardens there are various war memorials and plaques to VC heroes including [Corporal Edward Foster VC](#), part of the Wandsworth Battalion who liberated Villers Plouich in 1917. Recently this small French village replicated the pinnacle on the roof of the Town Hall, in a monument marking its special connection with Wandsworth. There is also a cannon cast at the Henckell Iron Mill on Garratt Lane.

2 Cross Wandsworth High Street opposite the Two Brewers pub into St Ann's Hill. On the corner of Fairfield Street to your left is an unusual brick structure commemorating the Town Hall opening. Specifically recalled is how 500,000 people waved 50,000 flags for Queen Mary and 42,000 bags of sweets were distributed to Wandsworth children, 2,000 of whom sang for her. Also described is a 'pool' which would appear to have now dried up.

3 Close to this site on Fairfield Street was the house of Francis Gilbert, visited in 1758 by his brother Reverend Nathaniel Gilbert, a plantation owner from Antigua. [John Wesley preached](#) for them on a number of occasions and baptised two of Gilbert's Antigua slaves who had accompanied him. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of Battersea Power Station is descended from this family.

4 Walk up St Ann's Hill passing the primary school which was the site of a 'school of industry for girls' founded here in 1800. Look for the characterful front of the Plowden and Smith art restoration workshop. In front of you, appearing from behind the trees is the St Ann's 'Pepperpot Church' one of the best loved in Wandsworth. One of the churches built to commemorate victories at Trafalgar and Waterloo, it was completed in 1822. Pass Denton Road and take a right into Borrodaile Road and the [Wendelworth estate](#). This was opened by Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan in 1949. Between these roads was the eastern end of an extraordinary structure of 33 arches which dominated this area for 80 years, then disappeared leaving barely a trace of its existence. In the wake of the '[Great Stink](#)' engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette masterminded a system to intercept raw sewage and prevent it being discharged into the Thames. Built between 1882 and 1885, Bazalgette's [storm relief sewer aqueduct](#) provided an overflow for diluted sewage which might have flooded during periods of significant rainfall. It ran over the Wandle Valley, sweeping gently across King George's Park from Merton Road to St Ann's Hill, almost making a beeline for St Ann's Church. The curved nature of its design was apparently a fatal flaw, causing it to expand in sunshine and move slightly. As a result it was demolished in 1968.

5 You are now entering an area of great industry. You will pass a road called Iron Mill Place and behind Borrodaile Road is a large Sainsbury's, once the site of the [Voelker Gas Mantle Works](#) one of many mantle factories in the area, employing a largely female workforce. The road bends to the left then swings right past a block called Merstone House. Follow a footpath straight ahead onto Garratt Lane.

6 To your left is the recently refurbished Garratt Tavern, once the Wagon and Horses pub and associated with The [Surrey Iron Railway](#) which would have passed here on its way up Garratt Lane. Drawn by horses and operational from 1803, it transported local produce along nine miles of track from Wandsworth to Croydon. The world's first constructed on iron rails, it had a brief but memorable existence. Beset with broken rails and superseded by the steam age, it fizzled out in 1846. Every so often one of its stone 'sleepers' emerges and for a while a cluster were embedded in the wall of the brewery in Ram Street. The best place to find out more about it is the [Wandle Industrial Museum](#) in Mitcham.

7 At [Garratt Lane](#) you are entering a world which was once the centre of great industry and activity. On the other side of the road was the [Adkins Mill](#) site, location of the Veritas Gas Mantle Works and the [Benhams](#) engineering company. In earlier times it was the site of James Henckell's Iron Mill which produced '*shot, shells, cannons and other implements of war*'.

8 Cross Garratt Lane into Mapleton Road noting the name of a retirement home on your right as you cross the Wandle. Mantle Court is actually on the site of an old colour works associated with printing and dying initiated by Huguenot refugees. Behind this is dominated by tower blocks and the Southside shopping centre and a sad tale of how to kill off a town centre. This area radically changed in the mid-60s with the destruction of swimming baths, a Victorian market and much-loved Stimpsons Buildings. [Wandsworth Stadium](#) was swept away after a brief 30 year history. In June 1970 the Arndale Centre opened along with accompanying high-rise housing disconnecting people from the High Street. All wrapped together with an aggressive traffic system, beneath which the poor little River Wandle disappeared from sight.

9 Go straight under the arch into King George's Park, renamed after a royal visit in 1923. On your right was the site of the greyhound stadium which could accommodate 20,000 spectators. The aqueduct followed the path of a fuchsia hedge between the disused bowling green and ornamental garden. A short set of steps leads to a grass area between the tennis courts indicating its passage towards Buckhold Road.

10 Follow Mapleton Road out of the park and turn right onto Buckhold Road. Opposite the bus-stop, a path connecting this road with Merton Road marks the western end of the aqueduct. A little further on, the army cadet centre at the fork with Broomhill Road was the site of much drilling and parading in readiness for the newly-recruited [Wandsworth Battalion's](#) involvement in the First World War.

11 A little further on was the site of yet another mantle factory, the Welsbach Incandescent Company - the names of some of the recent development here reflect the nature of their work, 'Filament Walk' etc. With the monolithic Southside and the towers to your right, you may feel a sense of dread as the one-way system approaches. For a last bit of relief, take a left after the Co-op into Chapel Yard.

12 Have a look here at a piece of old Wandsworth which has survived the frantic development on all sides. The old memorial hall stands on the site of a Huguenot chapel dating from the late 17th century, marking a place where people who fled religious persecution in France and contributed so much to this area first met so very long ago. Its something acknowledged by the representation of tears on [Wandsworth Borough Council's coat of arms](#).

13 Take a sharp right onto Wandsworth High Street and turn left. From here you can admire some of the treasures on the other side of the road. All Saints Church, built by Wesminster Abbey is a site where people have worshipped since the 13th century. W G Child's tailor shop dates from 1890. Take your time to observe the character of some of the shop-fronts, entrances and alleyways which are unnoticed by the endless flow of traffic passing by. Cross at the first traffic lights and aim for a pub on the other side called L'Affaire. You are now on the 'island', with four lanes of traffic on all sides dominating this last stretch.

14 Follow the road round past Chelsea Cars - a legacy from the golden age of motor travel when many weekends jaunts down the Portsmouth Road and into the country began with a check-up at a number of garages in this location. You are now on the famous Armoury Way - a nod to the [iron works](#) on Garratt Lane which made weapons for Waterloo and Trafalgar. This area was called Wandsworth Plain and many slums were cleared from it in the 1930s. The blocks of housing have names associated with some of the [mills in the area](#); Bolting, Middle Mill, Brazil. King George VI opened these in 1938. In the 16th century, Middle Mill which had its own windmill until 1893 produced a scarlet dye for which Wandsworth became famous.

15 Across the road, look for the Crane pub dating from 1742 and named after one of the cranes on the nearby wharves. A sign suggests its haunted by 'the ghost of a small boy in knickerbockers'. Behind this is Dornay Road named after another gas factory owner and where it all began for [Silas Burroughs and Henry Wellcome](#), whose factory located here in 1880 developed into the world's largest pharmaceutical company.

16 Look behind here as four lanes of traffic roars towards you. Wandsworth's one-way system was instigated without any public consultation as a 'temporary' measure in 1964. In the 30s planners were heavily influenced by fascist autobahns and autostrades in Italy and Germany, fast-flowing orbital and radial roads were seen as the way forward. Damage caused by the War was seen as further reason to push forward and clear out the old. The area was included in the South Circular in 1953. As congestion got worse, local press led the call for a one-way system claiming it would be good for business.

17 Crossing over the Wandle the newly-developed Ram Brewery site is on your right. The vast area on your left was between 1837 and 1971 the site of the mighty '[Wandsworth and District Gas Company](#)'. The largest employer in the area supplying coal gas for lighting and heating. A fleet of colliers brought in the coal. One of these was the famous [SS Wandle](#) which commanded by Captain Mastin fought off a U-boat in the First World War and a received a heroic welcome home.

18 Cross Ram Street and stay on the island observing a busy intersection leading into Old York Road. Look for the Zodiac record shop on the corner opposite where I bought second hand cassette tapes 30 years ago, closed now but still hanging in there. Stay on the island, passing The Grapes pub and turning right into Barchard Road. Named after a prosperous Huguenot family involved in printing and dying, some of the oldest surviving workers cottages in the area are on this street. Look out for a barely legible tablet on one of them inscribed 'Victoria Place 1839' - its hard to make sense of all the changes it has seen on every side of it.

19 Turn left into Ram Street and you might want to divert into the recently-developed [Young's Brewery](#) site recently reborn as '[The Ram Quarter](#)'. There are some good heritage information displays and pleasant riverside vistas as the Wandle re-emerges. The Brewery, famous for its use of carthorses to make local deliveries has been here since 1832.

20 Follow Ram Street back onto Wandsworth High Street, turning left past the former [Palace Theatre](#), one of at least five cinemas in the area and return to the Town Hall. As the cavalcade of cars rolls past, lets hope for a cleaner, healthier future.

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