



Summerstown 182  
**GREAT ESCAPES**

**'WALKIN IN A WOMBLE WONDERLAND'**  
WELCOMING AFC WIMBLEDON HOME TO PLOUGH LANE (4.5 miles, (50-60 mins)  
Start at **ST MARY'S CHURCH, WIMBLEDON ROAD, SW17**

# 'WALKIN IN A WOMBLE WONDERLAND'

## WELCOMING AFC WIMBLEDON HOME TO PLOUGH LANE (2.5 miles, allow 50-60 mins)

Devised to help everybody through the lockdown, these downloadable maps take in significant features of historical interest for you to enjoy on walks 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.**



**One of the greatest, almost unbelievable stories in an area rich in history, is that of the fortunes of Wimbledon Football Club. Dickie Guy's penalty save, Princess Diana presenting the Cup, the day SW19 was invaded by Harry the Haddock, their extraordinary rise through the leagues, not once but twice. Almost thirty years after their last game here, they are about to return to Plough Lane. A huge development transforming this area, nestling between the Wandle and Garratt Lane awaits them. This walk will hopefully inform any fans too young to remember this locality or perhaps stir memories of those in need of a refresher of some of the history of this area. History in which they have played a big part and will continue to shape. WELCOME HOME TO SUMMERSTOWN, AFC WIMBLEDON.**

**1 START ST MARY'S CHURCH, Wimbledon Road, SW17** - Built in 1904 the church replaces an earlier one constructed nearby in 1836 which had to be demolished due to subsidence. Summerstown was always viewed as a poor area, liable to flooding. Charles Booth described it as 'a region of mists, low-lying on heavy clay soil, exceedingly depressing one should suppose to health, as it undoubtedly is to the imagination; a feeling enhanced by the presence of two fever hospitals, two cemeteries, a lunatic asylum and a prison'. Edward Thomas viewed it as 'more suitable for vegetables than men' when he cycled through in 1913 observing 'a mixture of the sordid and the delicate'. With its fertile Wandle soils, a scattering of farms and allotments, its easy to see how Plough Lane was named. At the end of Wimbledon Road, at the pedestrian entrance to the Aboyne Estate, a historic plaque commemorates the nurseries of [Peter Barr 'The Daffodil King'](#).

**2** Cross Wimbledon Road and bear right past the Summerstown Mission and two historic pubs, The Plough and The White Lion, where many pre-match pints were sunk. The Plough (Tile Giant) once had stables attached and the old Mead path alongside it was the route of the world famous [Surrey Iron Railway](#) which also passed down Summerstown. Financed by local businessmen who saw an opportunity to move their produce more efficiently, nine miles of track from Wandsworth to Croydon opened in 1803 after being initiated by an Act of Parliament. The first in the world to be constructed on iron rails, it had a brief but memorable existence. Drawn by horses it transported coal, building materials, manure, oil, seeds - everything except people. Beset with broken rails and superseded by the steam age, it fizzled out in 1846.

**3** An area in front of Lidl stretching all the way up to the Wandle and over to its west bank was where watercress was grown until just before the war. Widely cultivated along the Wandle from the 1850s, often in channels originally cut for the calico printing factories. It was also an area of allotments, some of which survive to this day. Watercress was a staple food for poorer people in the area, sold in comerships and door-to-door. Eliza James known as '[The Watercress Queen](#)' was one of the biggest growers in the area and her company survives today as 'Vitagress'. Her main base was at Crown Mill near Tooting and Mitcham FC's ground. She is buried in West Norwood Cemetery and when she died in 1927, the Daily Mirror reported: 'For a woman by her own unaided efforts to have amassed £20,000 (£3.5 million today) three or four times over by selling watercress is surely one of the most wonderful romances of business London has ever known'. A typhoid outbreak in Croydon in 1937, refrigeration and increased availability of other salads killed the trade off. Alfred Smeed summed up the popularity of watercress 'It is in use all the year round, it can be eaten with every meal, its flavour is unexceptionable, its digestibility satisfactory, it is warm and grateful to the stomach, and there are very few persons to whom it is distasteful'.

**4** The Wimbledon greyhound stadium which dominated this area for almost 90 years was [opened on 19 May 1923 by Tallulah Bankhead](#). The most famous dog to race here was 'Mick the Miller' who had a stand named after him and starred in a film in the 30's called 'The Wild Boy'. It was a popular site for [speedway](#) attracting crowds of up to 40,000 people in the 50's and 60's. Dashing riders like world champions Ronnie Moore and Barry Briggs were local celebrities. In 1978 Queen filmed a video for their record 'Bicycle Race' with 100 naked models riding around the track.

**5** Opposite the Shell garage is Copper Mill Lane. Don't be fooled by its run-down appearance, named after one of the three significant mills in this area, it has a rich history. Its also the historic route connecting Wandsworth and Merton on which a toll had to be paid to pass through. The electricity substation dates from 1933 and is part of a network powering the capital. An underground road tunnel goes all the way to Kensal Green. A mill may have been on this site from 1150 supplying flour for the monks at Merton Abbey. For almost 200 years it was a [copper mill](#), powered by one of the biggest mill wheels in Europe. A constant sound was the hammer beating out copper sheets. From 1890 it was a leatherworks and some buildings from this period still stand. In the 30's the jawbone of a giant whale was displayed as a feature in one of the gardens.

**6** Cross the road at the Wandle bridge and continue alongside the 2008 residential development which stands on the site of the old [Plough Lane](#) ground demolished in 2002. The names of the blocks echo some of the legends associated with the club. On the corner with Durnsford Road is Bassett House. Look out for the art installation by Sam Burford interpreting the 1988 FA Cup Final. Follow the road right and then right again into the development. With Reed House on your left, Cork and Stannard Houses on your right, this is as close as it gets to treading the turf where the Dons once played. The last occasion was 4 May 1991 against Crystal Palace. Reserve matches took place here for a few years but the ground became derelict with various proposals to build supermarkets falling through. There was also talk of the club relocating to Dublin.

**7** Wimbledon Old Centrals formed in 1889, becoming Wimbledon FC in 1901. After nomadic early days, they came to Plough Lane in 1912. One of the giants of the non-league game, their finest hour was beating Sutton United in 1963 to win the FA Amateur Cup at Wembley. In 1975 they knocked First Division Burnley out of the FA Cup and drew with the mighty [Leeds United](#), one of the greatest teams in Europe at the time. In 1977 they were elected to join the football league and rose

quickly through the divisions entering the top league in 1986. Just two years later they beat Liverpool in the FA Cup Final. The Hillsborough disaster of 1989 prompted the Taylor report which required a move to a larger stadium. From 1991 to 2001 Wimbledon ground-shared with Crystal Palace. In 2002 the club's owners agreed to move it to Milton Keynes, where Wimbledon FC was subsequently renamed. Outraged fans re-formed their club, under the ownership of the Dons Trust. An incredible five promotions in nine years saw AFC Wimbledon regain their Football League status. In 2014 the club submitted a planning application for a new stadium in Plough Lane and in 2017 got permission to start building this on the site of the old greyhound stadium, just across the Wandle, not much more than a throw-in from their old home.

**8** Backtrack a bit and divert right to get the other side of an iron fence and onto the Wandle path. You are now on a very overlooked section of the [Wandle Trail](#) which runs 11 miles from Croydon and Carshalton to where it meets the Thames near Wandsworth Bridge. Take a left with excellent views across the river of the old leatherworks and substation. You may see a horse in the field here and behind that is a travellers site run by Merton Council, an enduring reminder of the [Gipsy/Traveller](#) heritage in this area.

**9** Beyond the Cappagh depot, just past a bridge is the site of the [Garratt Printworks](#). This went on to become the location of a notable cardboard box making factory owned by Hugh Stevenson. For a while it was known as the [Corruganza Works](#) and here in 1908, 44 courageous young women workers launched strike action after a wage cut. Supported by the pioneering trade union activist Mary Macarthur who famously addressed the women at a rally in Trafalgar Square, the decision was overturned. The factory was here until the early 80's and one of the biggest employers in the area with over 2,000 people working there. Stevenson's son Robert went to the USA and ended up working for Disney and directed 'Mary Poppins' and 'The Love Bug'.

**10** Enjoy the tranquility of this leafy stretch, which would make a delightful match-day walk to the ground from Earlsfield Station. To your left is the Weir Road industrial estate on the site of the old sewage treatment works. At the Trewint Street bridge there is another travellers site. The river here has been channelled and re-directed on numerous occasions and the area was once the location of the expansive '[Garratt Mills](#)'. In the late 17th century these were the second largest supplier of gunpowder to the Royal Ordnance, arming Wars against the Dutch and the Irish. Other substances produced here were snuff, oil, paper and bone meal. The only branch line of The Surrey Iron Railway diverted down Trewint Street to this site. On the corner of Summerley Street stood Garratt House, the mill-owner's home and in its later years that of architect Edward Mountford who designed nearby St Andrew's Church, the Old Bailey and Battersea Town Hall.

**11** Take a right into Steerforth Street and follow this into Weybourne Street, taking a right into Garratt Park. This area was once central to the Garratt Mills and the site of a large mill pond. On your right, look for a small track circuit. This was a venue for the hugely popular [cycle speedway](#) sport which attracted large crowds in the 50's and 60's. Trinidadian pianist Winifred Atwell was President of local club South London Rangers.

**12** Turn left out of the park into Siward Road and turn right towards the back of Burtop Road estate. Built in 1970, you are now treading '[The Lost Streets of Earlsfield](#)' four terraces swept away when the Wandle burst its banks in September 1968. One was Turtle Road, home of the Newbon family, connected to Wimbledon FC legend, Dave Willis and often visited by jazz pioneer [Sadie Crawford](#). Take a left up some steps and emerge on Garratt Lane, bear right and cross at the traffic lights just after Burntwood Lane.

**13** Take the next left into Franche Court Road and follow this to the bend, turning right into Peartree Avenue. You are now in a modern millennial development but once again walking on the site of significant sporting heritage unearthed by local historian Kevin Kelly. Between 1853 and 1864 this was the site of [Robert Sadler's Copenhagen Running Grounds](#) and the sport of pedestrianism, literally the forerunner of modern day athletics. Tens of thousands once gathered here to boisterously cheer on the likes of native North American 'Deerfoot' and other renowned athletes of the day.

**14** Bear right and aim to pass via Bramston Road to the left of the back of the [Anglo American Laundry](#) into Burmester Road. The largest employer of women in this area was run for 30 years by Alice Creeke who lived in a big house overlooking Garratt Green called 'The Chestnuts'. Laundries were harsh environments but this particular establishment styled itself as 'The Finest Laundry in England'. It grew fruit trees, ran sports clubs and encouraged performances of its drama group. A pair of white horses pulling one of its wagons pops up on a short film about cart-horses. A number of elderly local residents have shown me their fancy linen which 'fell out of the back of the laundry wagon'. Burmester Road takes its name from a local landowner whose son was killed in the Zulu Wars at the Battle of [Isandhlwana](#) in 1879. Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Burmester Pulein was played in the film 'Zulu Dawn' by Denholm Elliott.

**15** At the end of Burmester Road on your right, [Burmester House](#) has a plaque marking the site of Althorp Lodge, HQ of Bob Sadler's athletic enterprise. He lived at a number of addresses with stints as landlord of The Corner Pin and The Prince of Wales pub (now Tesco Express). Much later, the landlord here was stuntman 'Noshier' Powell whose red book presented to him on 'This is Your Life' was mounted above the door.

**16** Cross at the traffic lights and bear right around the bend. Imagine the early 60's and a young man busking outside The Prince of Wales. Marc Feld transformed into [Marc Bolan](#) and T-Rex and was Britain's biggest early 70's pop star. His parents relocated here into a prefab opposite The Corner Pin, roughly on the site of Tradecarpet.

**17** Close to this was the site of the old St Mary's Church after which the road was once named. 'Church Street', now Summerstown was the main road in the old village, lined on both sides with the homes of mill workers, largely all demolished by the late 50's. The cottage next to The Corner Pin dating from the 1830's is the last survivor. At least 25 servicemen living on this road were killed in the [First World War](#), remembered on a memorial in St Mary's Church. Many worked with horses or traded on the streets. At the end of the road, turn left and follow Wimbledon Road back to the church.

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

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