



# TOOTING BLACK HISTORY CYCLE TRAIL



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and help put  
another historic  
blue plaque up  
in Tooting!

**ON YOUR BIKE  
FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH!  
#PedalPowerToThePeople**

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**START/FINISH**

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**This Tooting Black History Cycle Trail was inspired by the events of this summer when the Black Lives Matter movement caused many of us to reassess our approach to communicating history. Wandsworth BLM lead the way with a series of extraordinary educational and informative gatherings here on Tooting Common attended by thousands of people. As statues came down around the country, we looked at the big houses, the expansive gardens and the generous benefactors in a new light. It explains a little bit about how we are as a country today. No one wants to change history but eyes are opening, minds are expanding and things will not be the same again.**

**1 START DR JOHNSON AVENUE, TOOTING COMMON** - Once lined with oak trees planted to commemorate Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Tooting Manor in 1600. Samuel Johnson was a writer, critic and compiler of the first modern English language dictionary. A frequent visitor to the Thrale family at their nearby Streatham Park estate, often accompanied by [Francis Barber](#), one of the best known of an estimated 10,000 black people living in London in the Georgian era. Barber was born a slave on a Jamaican sugar plantation and came to Britain in 1752, joining Johnson's household after the death of his wife. After some time at sea he became Johnson's valet, great friend and heir. A plaque on Johnson's home in London celebrates Barber's contribution to his life and work. His name also lives on in this area, at Francis Barber Close in Streatham and a school in Tooting.

**2** Cross Tooting Bec Road passing to the left of the Tooting Bec Athletics track. Built in 1936 and one of the first floodlit facilities in the country, some of the world's finest athletes have performed or trained there. Two of Britain's first black Olympians [Jack London](#) and Harry Edward almost certainly visited. London who was born in Guyana, won two medals in the 1928 Olympics and was coached by Albert Hill from Trevelyan Road. 1980s black British athletes; Keith Connor, Phil Brown, Bev Callender and Daley Thompson are all honoured by having roads named after them in Battersea, just off Wandsworth Road.

**3** Take a left off the path onto West Drive, doubling back towards the main road. This leads to leafy North Drive bordering the old 100 acre Streatham Park estate of the Thrale family. No5 was for a while a children's home and someone who spent some time there was actor Lennie James, one of this country's most popular and successful film and television actors of the last ten years. A former pupil at Ernest Bevin School, he and his brother lost their mother when he was ten years old and his moving account of his early days here [That First Without Her Christmas Day](#) was on Radio 4 a few years ago. It now adjoins [Tooting Community Garden](#) run by Transition Tooting. In 2019 Lennie became an ambassador for the children's charity [Bamardo's](#), setting up a fund named after his birth and foster mums, Phyllis and Pam. In the housing estate on Colson Way [The Streatham Society](#) placed a blue plaque on the original site of the Thrale's house, which was demolished in 1863. A [mulberry tree](#) in front of Emmi's convenience store is associated with Dr Johnson. From North Drive, take a right into Aldington Road and left into Ullathorne Road, circumnavigating the estate.

**4** This leads into Furzedown Road and at the roundabout look out for the old Lodge building and Furzedown Drive which lead up to Furzedown House, now enclosed by Graveney School. Built in 1794, it was owned by Henry Baring, a member of the Baring banking dynasty and the Haigh family with interests in the East India Company. The Barings are well known for profiting from the Atlantic slave trade and the East India Company were involved in the slave trade from 1621. See the work of University College London's [Legacies of British Slave-ownership](#) which details the compensation paid to owners when slavery was abolished in 1833.

**5** Continue to the next roundabout and take the second left onto Church Lane. Just after Cowick Road, on your left hand side, a green plaque marks the entrance to the site of the old St Benedict's Hospital. A black star on the gates was the symbol of the Catholic school who built it originally. Its also an emblem on the Ghanaian flag making this a good place to learn about [Esuantsiwa Jane Goldsmith](#), whose recently published memoir includes the extraordinary story of her journey to Ghana to find her father. She has fought inequality for 40 years as an activist in the women's movement and for human rights worldwide.

**6** A little further on, turn right into Eswyn Road. At the end of this turn left and just past Tooting Primary, Francis Barber School bears the name of the black Georgian from Jamaica, educated by Dr Johnson and an assistant in much of his work. After Johnson's death in 1784, Barber retired with his family to live in Lichfield and passed away in 1801. The current headmaster Francis Emeruwa was an outstanding rugby player before injury prematurely ended his career.

**7** At the end of here, turn left onto busy Mitcham Road. A short distance down on the other side of the road, opposite Vant Road is the Mixed Blessings bakery. [Tooting Music Centre](#) AKA 'TMC' recording studio was once located behind here. It was frequented in the 70s and 80s by an eclectic mix of famous names, including glam-rockers, synthpopsters, post-punks and reggae artists. Popular local legend has it that one of these was Bob Marley, who left his mark by scrawling his signature on a wall. In the early 80s it was a highly significant reggae studio. Black Slate, Errol Dunkley, Aswad, Mikey Dread, Dillinger and Leroy Smart all passed through. The founders of 'Dub Vendor' recorded their early hits here on the 'Fashion Records' label.

**8** A little further on you will see St Nicholas Church on the left. It contains tablets and memorials to the great and the good from earlier ages, many connected to a number of manor houses in the area. Sir John Hebdon was an envoy to the Russian Tsar. Philip Gidley-King was one of the first Governors of New South Wales. The Gassiot family were prominent wine-merchants. [Sir James Bateman](#) is perhaps one of the less good figures. Lord Mayor of London, Member of Parliament and Governor of the Bank of England, he was involved in the founding of the South Sea Company financed by the supply of African slaves to South America. When he died in 1718, his funeral was held at night, a procession of 100 horse riders carrying flaming torches followed his hearse to the church. This was just a few years before the South Sea Bubble burst causing many investors to lose their money. He is reported to have left a fortune of more than £400,000.

**9** Just a bit further on is the beautiful St Boniface Roman Catholic Church which dates from 1907 and is covered in twinkling fairy lights at Christmas. It's estimated that over fifty different nationalities currently worship at this Church.

**10** Take a right into Bickersteth Road, passing The Trident Centre, associated with the late Junior Delgado, one of reggae's most distinctive voices and a major artist in the 70s and 80s. He later ran a recording studio here called ['Incredible Music.'](#)

**11** Take the second right into Himley Road and passing the Tooting Sea Cadets HQ, turn left into Mellison Road, then at the end of that, right into Trevelyan Road. This runs into the A24, Tooting High Street. As you cross it consider that you are on Stane Street, one of the first great Roman roads radiating out of London, in this case stretching all the way to Chichester. Thanks to historians like [David Olusoga](#) and [Mary Beard](#) it is now known that these Roman armies contained the first black people to set foot in the British Isles. Many came from North Africa, such as a Moorish unit who guarded Hadrian's Wall.

**12** Do a left, then quick right into Carlwell Street. Ahead of you is the mighty St George's Hospital. Since its transfer from Hyde Park Corner, people have come from all over the world to work here and it has been featured for the last few years on Channel Four's ['24 Hours in A&E.'](#) It's a source of great local pride, never more so than over the last six months when so many of its staff have put their lives on the line. Nurses from the Caribbean, midwives from the Philippines, mental health care workers from Mauritius - an extraordinary mix of cultures and ethnicities adding so much to the vibrancy of our area. The last census in 2011 showed that just under half the people living in Tooting were born outside the UK. ['Journeys'](#) a beautiful film made by people from the Furzedown Project, CARAS and pupils from Furzedown Primary School tells some of their stories.

**13** Turn left into Maybury Street and right into Blackshaw Road. After passing the hospital complex, take the first major right into Fountain Road. A short way down here look for a blue plaque on your right. In 2014, a mention on a Radio 4 programme ['The Lost Women of British Jazz'](#) lead to local awareness that a pioneering musician had been born in a house on Fountain Road. [Louisa Marshall](#) travelled the world, played with some of the greatest musicians of the age and is believed to be the first British female musician to feature on a jazz recording. 'Sadie' spent the last 30 years of her life in the USA and is buried in [Washington DC](#). The first decade of the 20th century and reign of King Edward VII was an extraordinary time when due to racism in their own country, a wave of African-American performers and musicians descended on London. Rag-time artists such as [Pete Hampton](#) performed at Buckingham Palace and the King himself received banjo lessons from the [Bohee brothers](#). Hampton and his wife Laura Bowman lived for a while in a house in Wimbledon Park they called ['Darktown Villa'](#). They were a great influence on the young Louisa, now 'Sadie Johnson' treading the boards as a dancer at the [Empire Theatre](#) in Leicester Square and learning the saxophone with her future husband Adolph Crawford.

**14** Turn left into Alston Road and then third left into Smallwood Road. At the end of this, take a right back onto Blackshaw Road. If you want to have a look in Lambeth Cemetery, it has a number of notable burials which are indicated on this [map](#). Two to consider are [Cherry Groce](#), paralysed in a police raid on her home which triggered riots in Brixton in 1985, she spent the rest of her life campaigning against injustice. She will be widely known in the black community but less so is [Sophar Ranganoo](#). Captain Frederick Marryat, from a [Wimbledon family](#) who profited enormously from their slave ownership, returned in 1826 from the Anglo-Burmese War with an eight year old boy. The child was presented to the Duke of Sussex, Queen Victoria's Uncle and grew up in the royal household at Kensington Palace. After the Duke's death he became a tailor, married and had a family. He is buried in an unmarked grave on the south side of Lambeth Cemetery.

**15** At the bottom of Blackshaw Road with the new AFC Wimbledon Stadium development emerging to the left, turn right at a mini-roundabout onto Wimbledon Road. Ahead of you is another roundabout and a pedestrian entrance to Aboyne Estate. A blue plaque here commemorates [Peter Barr](#) known as 'The Daffodil King'. He raised a family in the area and tested these flowers at nurseries along Garratt Lane in the late 19th century and raised the profile of the humble daffodil into

this country's favourite flower. The ['Blooming Tooting'](#) project has raised awareness of his work in this area and encouraged community planting.

**16** Turning right, follow Garratt Lane to Streatham Cemetery. This has a connection with [John Archer](#), London's first black mayor and founding president of the African Progress Union. Elected Mayor of Battersea in 1913, Wandsworth Council are planning to put up a statue of him. He was a friend of [Jane Waring Roberts](#) the widow of the first President of Liberia, Joseph Jenkins Roberts. After his death she came to London and lived with Archer and his wife. She had wanted to be buried in Liberia, but changed her mind and is here in an unmarked plot near the war memorial. Liberia was established as a colony in Africa in the 1820s where freed American slaves were encouraged to settle. It was the first African republic to proclaim its independence.

**17** Continue down Garratt Lane passing Khartoum Road on your right. The death in Sudan of [General Gordon](#) a Victorian military hero brought down the British government in 1885. Take the third left at the flower shop into Khama Road. The colonial age of the missionary was strongly identified in this area and this street was named after [King Khama III](#) of the Bamangwato people in Bechuanaland (now Botswana). Having converted to Christianity in 1860 he allied himself with British colonisers and supported them in the Boer War. Threatened with having his country carved up and racially segregated by Cecil Rhodes, in 1895, supported by the London Missionary Society and the Temperance Movement, he travelled to London with two other Kings, Bathoen I and Sebele to appeal to Queen Victoria. Rhodes stood down, a famous victory for ['The Three Kings'](#). Moffat Road is named after Robert Moffat, another missionary who lived most of his life in Africa.

**18** Turn right into Broadwater Road, location of the annual Community Fun Day organised by the Balham and Tooting Community Association ([BATCA](#)) with local faith groups and charities creating one of the highlights in the Tooting calendar.

**19** Go left into Fishponds Road. Until about 1920 the southern section of this was Uganda Street, another nod to a former British colony. Not long after independence, Idi Amin's expulsion saw 27,000 [Ugandan Asians](#) coming to Britain in the early 70s. Another local street which bears the colonial name of an African country is Dahomey Road in Furzedown, now Benin.

**20** Turn left into Hebdon Road. Pass Fishponds Field and turn right into Lingwell Road. Bear right into Glenburnie Road, then left into Beechcroft Road passing Ernest Bevin College. [Sadiq Khan](#) attended here and was taught by Naz Bokhari, the first Muslim headteacher of a British secondary school. Other notable former pupils include Eric Boateng, Oris Deley, Joe Joyce and footballer [Owen Price](#) who aged 14, scored a world record-breaking 4.5 second goal. With over 40 years in the business, Neil Fraser AKA [Mad Professor](#) is one of the giants of British roots reggae and dub.

**21** Take the fourth right after the school and follow Brodrick Road across Trinity Road onto 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 high on the wall is a plaque placed two years ago by the [Nubian Jak Trust](#) in honour of [Daphne Steele](#). Born in Guyana, 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 and some of her family still live in the area.

**22** Go back along St James's Drive onto Trinity Road. Just after Holy Trinity Church, turn right into Glenburnie Road. Pass Fircroft Primary School and take the third left into Beechcroft Road. Halfway down here on the right is a very pretty church which was a lovely shade of purple a few years ago. Formerly St Peter's Presbyterian Church built in 1895, its now the home of the [New Testament Assembly](#), founded by Bishop Melvin Powell who came here from Jamaica in 1961. Renowned for its gospel choir and music, it has been at the forefront in efforts to reduce black mental health inequalities in partnership with other local organisations. Many of the [Windrush](#) generation who arrived on 22 June 1948 were initially accommodated in a WW2 deep level shelter near Clapham South station, just over a mile away.

**23** With the old 'Telephone and Employment Exchange' in front of you, turn right onto Upper Tooting Road, first left into Brudenell Road and right into Ravenfield Road. Take another left into Lynwood Road. An old Methodist chapel on the corner is now home of 'The Church of God of Prophecy' associated with Karen Gibson, leader of [The Kingdom Choir](#) who sang for Nelson Mandela and at Harry and Meghan's wedding.

**24** At the top of the hill turn left onto Blakenham Road, right into Hillbrook and passing the school, bear right into Brudenell Road passing All Saints Church, famous for its acoustics and stunning interior. Artists who recorded here include Pavarotti, Kiri Te Kanawa and Paul McCartney who chose it for his 'Tribute to Linda'.

**25** Turn left onto Franciscan Road, then right into Mantilla Road. Turn left into Church Lane, passing the site of the old Tooting Bec Asylum. This was demolished about 25 years ago and replaced with a development called Heritage Park. One of the roads, Massingberd Way is named after John Massingberd, a London merchant and treasurer of the East India Company. Turn right onto Tooting Bec Road passing alongside the Common, scene of all those inspirational Black Lives Matter gatherings this summer, the first left will bring you back to Dr Johnson Avenue.