

FOREST HILL HISTORY WALK & TREASURE HUNT

By Rod Macarthur, July 2008

Text and pictures available at SE23.com

INTRODUCTION

This History Walk & Treasure Hunt is compiled from information obtained mainly from the internet. I have unashamedly plundered, pillaged and purloined everything I could possibly find to make the experience as interesting, informative and enjoyable as possible. My special thanks to local historian Steve Grindlay for all his help, Rob McIntosh for his informative walks of Forest Hill, and everyone else who has ever contributed information or joined in discussions about Forest Hill & Sydenham on the internet. It's only right to set the scene and start off with a brief history of the area:

SMUGGLERS, HIGHWAYMEN AND FOOTPADS

On the northern hills overlooking Croydon stood the Great North Wood, immortalised today in the area known as Norwood. Has this wood been lost without trace? Not quite, remnants still remain and one of the larger fragments is made up of Sydenham Hill Wood and Dulwich Woods.

Sometimes known as The King's Wood, the Great North Wood was a natural oak forest that covered most of the area of raised ground starting some four miles south of central London, covering the Sydenham Ridge and the southern reaches of the River Effra and its tributaries (Dulwich, Herne Hill & Brockwell Park). At its fullest extent, the wood's boundaries stretched almost as far as Croydon and as far north as Camberwell.

Such a thickly-wooded area brought mixed rewards for London. The Domesday Book in 1086 records the area as being controlled by the Archbishop of Canterbury for "pleasure-hunting, fuel and pannage for 200 swine." Pannage is an English legal term for the practice of turning out domestic pigs in a wood or forest, in order that they may feed on such things as fallen acorns or beechmast (beech nuts). The term 'Norwood' first appears in the Assize Rolls of 1272.

By Tudor times the wood was providing first-class oak for the Navy's fighting ships, and two of Francis Drake's vessels, the 'Golden Hinde' and the 'Revenge', were constructed from Norwood oak. However, crime flourished in these dense and hilly areas. It was a popular conduit for smugglers bringing tea, silk, brandy and lace from the south coast and into the capital. It was also a perfect bolthole or hideaway for highwaymen and footpads (muggers). In 1652, the diarist John Evelyn was unwise enough to cross through the area. He was 3 miles from Bromley Common when he was set upon and dragged from his horse, tied to a tree and robbed.

But slowly the wood was disappearing. What the Navy had left was falling prey either to woodmen from London or charcoal burners from Croydon. It also still provided land on which to keep livestock and for hunting. The Enclosure Acts, however, dispossessed many people by parcelling the woods and commons into owned properties. The Enclosure Acts of 1797, 1805/6 and 1827 drove the locals away from the area in favour of landowners. Most

famously the police were sent in to break up the encampments of gypsies on the hill which today bears their name and on which they had lived since the 1600s.

Nevertheless, two hundred years ago it was still a rural place peopled by gypsies and other, less desirable, characters. The Great North Wood now entered its most exclusive phase. Too far from the capital for lower-class workers, the new villas that sprung up on these hills were destined for bankers, solicitors and merchants, and by 1836 coaches were trundling down the hill heading for the City.

It was still a heavily wooded area of fine oaks, yew trees and quiet country lanes – a few cottages among the woods and along a rough road from Northwood (now Norwood) that ran through the wooded area of Upper Sydenham to the lower part called Southend (now Downham). The inhabitants grazed their livestock, collected wood for fuel and drank cider made from the local orchards of apples and pears.

Forest Hill is named from extensive woodland formerly covering part of the ridge that is now Honor Oak Road. Part of Lewisham parish, it bordered the Great North Wood and Westwood Common into Sydenham. It provided timber for the great dockyards at nearby Deptford. Until the mid 19th century it was sparsely inhabited with charcoal burners and woodsmen.

At that time, nearby Sydenham was known only as a "genteel hamlet of Lewisham" - to which parish the greater part of it belonged - famed for its sylvan retreats; charming prospects, and for its medicinal springs. The greatest change to this area resulted from the passing of the Enclosure Act of 1810. This proposed the enclosure of all common land in Lewisham except for Blackheath.

Canals became popular for the transportation of goods in the late 18th century. The Croydon Canal Company was formed in 1801 and work was started on the Deptford to Croydon canal following an Act of incorporation passed by Parliament which recognised the town of Sydenham as having water. The canal was nine miles long and was formally opened on the 22nd October 1809. The canal did not prosper for long as competition came in the form of the railways and it closed in 1836.

Further rapid change occurred after the opening of the Croydon Railway in 1839. Sydenham and Forest Hill grew rapidly in favour as places of residence and still more rapidly after the opening of the Crystal Palace, on the summit of the hill, in 1854. There had now sprung into existence long lines of villas, detached and semi-detached cottages, terraces, so-called parks, and streets.

This walk is an adventure to seek out elegant mansions, villas and cottages. To learn about the heroes and benefactors, saints and sinners that used to live there and to discover local gems, pearls of wisdom, a few rough diamonds and the Jewel in Forest Hill's Crown. Enjoy!

Leave the Lemon Grove (pic [1](#)) and turn left along London Road

On your left is a lane called Upton Leaze (pic [2](#)) – the OED states that a Leaze is a pasture; pasturage; meadow-land; or common - from a root of "let" indicating that this is land that has been let-alone (pic [2a](#)). The name could well be derived from a distant link with Westwood Common. It's not part of today's walk but there are some beautiful glass windows¹ (pics [2b](#) and [2c](#)) at Upton Leaze.

Walking along London Road you come to a white house opposite the T junction of Honor Oak Road with London Road. It was the property of Andrew & George Taylor and it is believed it was called Forest Lodge (pic [3](#)). A & G Taylor were probably the leading

Victorian photographers of "Cartes de Visite", a sort of postcard plus a means of correspondence of the time. The house is now a London Borough of Lewisham building of some sort.

George Taylor (1839-1911) was Managing Partner of A & G Taylor. He started as a carpenter's apprentice in Aberdeen, working on the building of Balmoral Castle. Taylor secured help from John Brown to photograph Queen Victoria, obtained a series of valuable copyrights, and on the proceeds of their sale, opened a number of studios in London, including Forest Hill. He organised a system of "clubs" in connection with factories, workshops & offices, appealing particularly to the working classes.

At the end of 4 years he was making £5,000 a year; by the end of 10 years £10,000 a year; at the end of 20 years £20,000 a year, and for a few years, after he had turned to picture postcards, he was making £30,000 a year, an absolute fortune! Records state that in 1871 a photographer was living at Forest Lodge, London Road, Lewisham.

Climb the hill to the top and cross the road at the traffic lights to the Museum

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

The totem pole (pic [4](#)) was London's first Alaskan totem pole, carved by Nathan Jackson, a Tlingit from Alaska. The Tlingit people developed a complex hunter-gatherer culture in the temperate rainforest of the southeast Alaska coast and the Alexander Archipelago. The 20 feet high structure of carved red cedar, painted with specially imported "ranch paint", was unveiled in its present position on 29 June 1985. An eagle (Nathan Jackson's main clan crest) is at the top of the pole and beneath it is a girl with a bag and a grizzly bear, illustrating a legend from the North West Coast of America of a girl who married a bear.

Frederick Horniman (1835–1906) (pic [4a](#)) a tea merchant was the founder of the Horniman Museum. Horniman & Co. was described in 1891 as the biggest tea firm in the world. The export trade alone in Horniman Pure Tea was estimated to exceed 5000 chests per week, each chest containing 100 lb of tea. Since 1868 he had been living at Surrey House (pic [4b](#)), Forest Hill but the scale of his collecting over twenty years was such that room by room the collections had taken over and eventually he moved to Surrey Mount at the top of the hill. At the end of 1890 he opened Surrey House as a free museum to the public on three days a week.

Although the house had been extended so that twenty-four 'saloons' were open to the public, the collection and the numbers of people visiting it had soon outgrown the space available. Frederick therefore decided to close and demolish the existing museum and build a new one on the site. As architect he chose Charles Harrison Townsend. The result was one of the most striking and original buildings (pic [4c](#)) in London. Townsend was from the arts and crafts³ school, designing two other notable buildings at the Bishopsgate Institute, 1895 and Whitechapel Gallery, 1897-9.

However, the Horniman Museum was to be his masterpiece with the exterior revealing art nouveau¹ influences and inspiration from the American architect HH Richardson. The front of the building is of asymmetric composition with a tall clock tower above the entrance, which is balanced by a segmental gable to the exhibition hall with a mosaic freeze. The scarcity of windows - the exhibition hall is top-lit - makes the building all the more distinctive. The freestyle exterior contrasts with the plain and functionally planned interior.

It has been described as "the jewel in Forest Hill's crown"; and as one of the few large-scale masterpieces of English free-style architecture. Townsend had created a truly unique

building with echoes of both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau architectural styles. The museum was completed at a cost of £40,000 in 1901 and has grade II listed status. Soon afterwards it was presented, with the collections and 15 acres of gardens, to the London county council, as representing the people of London - 'forever as a free museum for their recreation, instruction and enjoyment'.

Townsend also designed the Emslie Hall, which was added to the museum in 1911 to provide a lecture theatre. The museum has expanded over the years with some less distinguished architecture. Then it benefitted from Millennium funding to replace these with a stunning new extension including the Musical Instrument Gallery and Education Centre - these were opened on 14 June 2002.

The mosaic (pic [4d](#)) was designed by Robert Anning Bell and created over 210 days by a team of mostly young women during the construction period (1898-1901). The neo-classical design "Humanity in the house of circumstance" symbolises personal limitations; and the fruit and flowers glimpsed beyond it, personal aspirations. The gates at either end are birth and death, and the figures represent Arts, Poetry, Music, Endurance, Humanity, Love, Hope, Charity, Wisdom, Meditation, and Resignation. There are more than 117,000 tesserae in the panel which is 10ft high and 32ft long.

What was Fred's middle name? (pic [4e](#))

Walk back down the hill and turn left into Honor Oak Road

Honor Oak Road was the original Forest Hill laid out in the 1780s. From here the name spread to the rest of the suburb, on the adjoining Sydenham Common after the enclosure. 'Sydenham New Town' was another early name for the Honor Oak Road development. The road retains a strong appeal, with a mix of early, mid and late 19th century houses and post war developments. The road winds gently along the shoulder of a ridge (pic [5](#)). Note the large villas with imposing Porticos⁴ (pics [5a](#), [5b](#) & [5d](#)) and porches (pic [5c](#)).

If you found the climb tiring, you may wish to sit on the bench on the corner of Westwood Park but you will have your back to Hill House

Hill House (pic [6](#)) is on the corner of Honor Oak Road with Westwood Park. This Georgian⁴ house was built c1796 and extended over the next few years. Henry Dudin, a Southwark warehouseman and corn factor, occupied the house for several years from 1807, and seems to have used it as a hunting lodge. He was Master of the Old Surrey Hunt, which met locally at that time. There are indications that the north wing was originally a stable block. Note the portico entrance⁴ (pic [6a](#)).

THE PRINCE, THE ACTRESS AND THE PINEAPPLE

Next door to Hill House is Ashberry Cottage (pic [6b](#)) – another Georgian house. There is a plaque on the front that claims that William, Duke of Clarence (who become William IV - pic [6c](#)) and his beautiful mistress Mrs Dorothea Jordan (pic [6d](#)), an actress, lived in this cottage. This is disputed by others who say that there is no evidence to support this claim, although there is a brightly painted Royal Coat of Arms at the back of the cottage and a large pineapple finial (pic [6e](#)).

A pineapple symbolises hospitality and a carved pineapple on a house or door is a sign of welcome. Seafaring captains used to impale fresh pineapples--souvenirs of their lengthy travels to tropical ports--atop the porch railings of their homes when they returned. It was a symbol then that the man of the house was home--albeit briefly--and receiving visitors. Of all

the British monarchs who have claimed that they have ruled the waves, only one, King William IV, has been a truly professional seafarer. Known as the "Sailor King" in his own lifetime, he saw himself as a naval officer who happened to become the sovereign rather than a monarch who had been a naval officer. Strangely, William also had a pineapple-shaped head!

William & Mrs Jordan (there was no Mr Jordan) had at least 10 illegitimate children together. David Cameron, Leader of the Conservative Party, is a direct descendant of this liaison.

Although a royal connection would be grand, documentary evidence suggests that the cottage was built in the 1820s; Mrs Jordan unfortunately died in poverty in 1816, abandoned by William. The cottage on this site, one of the earliest buildings in this fledgling part of Forest Hill, was demolished to make way for the present house.

Ashberry cottage is inaccurately named after Joseph Ashbarry, the owner in the 1830s and 1840s. An unusual feature is the arched chimney. Whether or not William & Mrs Jordan lived in a cottage on this site, the modern flats next to it are called Clarence Court.

How many pots are on top of the arched chimney? (pic [6f](#))

Carefully cross the road and turn right, walking down Ewelme Road

"High and healthy" was how Forest Hill was described in the 1930s. Forest Hill is one of the highest hills in London with spectacular views towards central London and, in front of you, the North Downs (pic [7b](#)). Note the Dutch gables on top of some of the villas in this road. If you stand with your back to Highworth House (pic [7a](#)), at No. 37, you can see the back of "Belmont" with its weathervane (pic [7](#)).

When was one of the villas built? (pic [7c](#))

The more modern houses (c1930s) from No.27 downwards display beautiful art deco style² stained glass doors and windows (pics [7d](#) & [7e](#)). It's really great to note that these windows have not all been lost to double-glazing. However, these houses are not the only gems. Have a look at the front door (pic [7f](#)) at No.28¹ – and look who's in the garden, at No. 22; no doubt she's wishing it was a bit warmer! (pics [7g](#) & [7h](#))

At the bottom of the road, contrast the appearance of No. 6 with the painted No. 4. You can see from the brickwork how vibrant No. 6 Ewelme Road (pic [7i](#)) would have been when first built.

Turn left at the junction with Devonshire Road

THE AUTOGRAPH KING'S PENFOLD PILLAR-BOX

Roadside pillar-boxes first appeared in 1852. Since then there have been hundreds of different varieties bearing the ciphers of six reigning monarchs. It was the writer, Anthony Trollope, a Post Office surveyor, who originally suggested the idea and the first boxes erected in the British Isles were on the Channel Islands. Initially, each Post Office district surveyor ordered boxes for his own area, resulting in a multitude of designs. It was not until 1859 that Cochrane and Co. began making 'First National Standard' pillar-boxes. Cast iron was and remains the preferred material of construction despite recent experimentation with sheet steel and polypropylene.

The most famous Victorian pillar-box was named after its designer, J.W. Penfold, and cast between 1866 and 1879. One hundred of the distinctive hexagonal boxes are still known to

exist and many remain in use, including two in Devonshire Road – both listed Grade II and there are only eight surviving examples of this type in the country. There were several types of Penfold box, cast in three sizes. The Devonshire Road box (pics [8](#) & [8a](#)) is an example of the fifth model and would have been made after 1872.

Note the hexagonal design, the initials VR (Queen Victoria's cipher) the Royal Coat of Arms and the floral/leafy top.

In 1899 a young man began sending postcards to people who had achieved some measure of success or notoriety. He asked them to sign the card, and return it to him. In time he accumulated several thousand cards, autographed by soldiers (for example, Lord Roberts, who had a house in Sydenham for a short time), politicians (Lloyd George, Woodrow Wilson), sportsmen (including W G Grace, who lived in Lawrie Park Road, Sydenham), churchmen (he wrote to the Pope in Latin), actors, explorers (including Ernest Shackleton, who lived next to St Bartholomew Church, Sydenham), scientists (John Logie Baird, who lived in Crescent Wood Road, Sydenham) and authors.

He also collected the signatures of less well-known people: the first person to write while flying in an aeroplane and the policeman who stopped Churchill driving the wrong way up a one-way street. He claimed to be the owner of the largest collection of modern autographs in the world, and proclaimed himself "The Autograph King". He was, in reality, W Reginald Bray (pic [8c](#)) of 135 Devonshire Road (pic [8b](#)). Reginald was born in 1880 and his family moved here in about 1899, at around this time Reginald began sending his postcards. He was a clerk in the City and each evening, on his return from work, he would write his cards, and post them. No doubt in the Penfold pillar-box almost directly outside his house.

From 1899 to 1934 he amassed a collection of over 10,000 autographs. He posted over 22,000 requests and, as he pointed out ruefully, 12,000 failed to reply, including Adolf Hitler. After several requests to Hitler he received a firm but polite refusal, stating that as the Fuhrer was already overburdened with work would Bray "refrain from further letters in this regard".

Walk back down to the junction with Ewelme Rd and continue along Devonshire Rd.

Name the Elizabethan holding court here (pics [8d](#) & [8e](#))

Look out for the old post office or, more correctly, the postmen's office (pic [8f](#)). The office and the plainer looking pillar box were both erected during the reign of Edward VII. The building has red brick, large windows, fancy scrolls and is set back from the road. It is now closed.

During the 1930s Reginald Bray appeared on the radio programme "In Town Tonight", not because of his autograph collection but as "The Human Letter". Apparently, he posted himself. One imagines Reginald wrapped in brown paper and stuffed into a mailbag but perhaps the truth is simpler. He lived about 100 yards from the Postmen's Office. It is suspected that he turned up there, perhaps with an address label and the correct postage attached to him, and was taken home by a postman. He also claimed to have posted, amongst other things, a turnip with the name, address and message carved on it!

At the end of the road turn right. This is the busy South Circular Road

The old public loo (now called the Old Washrooms - pics [9](#) & [9a](#)) on the corner of David's Road has been converted into a house.

Cross David's Road

THE LOCK WITHOUT A KEY

The Croydon Canal (pic [10](#)) was constructed through the area in 1809 but the large number of locks (28) meant it was not a commercial success. It was bought by the London & Croydon Railway Company who constructed their railway along the same route. This section of road used to be called Canal Road. The retaining wall of the high pavement in David's Road (pics [10a](#) and [10b](#)) beneath the Hob, is the side of a lock and the raised pavement is a descendant of the former towpath itself. You can now see a mural (pic [10d](#)) which depicts scenes from Forest Hill's history, including a crown. It's the work of local artist James Salisbury and was completed in 2003.

The London and Croydon Railway opened in 1839. The tracks were cutting through open country. Dartmouth Arms was the original name for Forest Hill station. It was taken from the adjoining pub (its site is diagonally opposite) one of the very few buildings in the area. It is significant that the caption on an old photo calls it the Dartmouth Arms, Sydenham, because Forest Hill scarcely existed as a suburb, the name had previously been used exclusively to fifteen or so houses in Honor Oak Road. Within fifteen years Forest Hill was established as the name for the district and the station (pic [10e](#)), from which hundreds of houses radiated.

The East London Line Project (formerly known as ELLX) will extend and upgrade the existing London Underground East London Line, converting it into a new metro-style (National Rail) train service. This will provide services that will ultimately extend North to Highbury & Islington, South to West Croydon and West to Clapham Junction and in the future could potentially facilitate 'orbital' journeys around London.

The project will be delivered in two phases. Phase one will extend from the existing station at New Cross Gate onto the National Rail network south to Crystal Palace and West Croydon and include Honor Oak Park, Forest Hill and Sydenham Stations. Phase one of the project will be delivered by June 2010 – in time for the Olympic Games...

What was the number of the tram? (pic [10f](#))

If you're going round the bend, you could be on the threshold of a discovery.

Whose shop used to be here? (pics [11](#) & [11a](#))

Cross the road & take the subway (at the side of W H Smith). Turn right into Perry Vale

THE ARMOURY AND THE FRENCH THREAT

Opposite is a new development (pic [12](#)) of flats called Forest Hill Central. There will be 71 Units but only 19 car parking spaces. There will, however, be lots of spaces for bicycles! There is also a seat by the station wall.

On this site there was a two storey cream-painted building (pic [12n](#)) with a slate roof, built around 1845/7. It was owned by a Mrs Goding. It is possible that between about 1847-1849 the Foresters Arms originated in this building before moving to the opposite corner of Hindsley's Place. However, a decade later the building was used for a rather unexpected, although better documented purpose.

During the first half of the 19th century there were periodic panics over fears that the French were planning to invade England. As a result, in 1859 the Government encouraged the formation of local volunteer forces, prepared to defend the realm or as some cynics of the time suggested the property of the wealthy, in the event of a French invasion.

A committee of local dignitaries was formed and they appointed a drill sergeant to train the volunteers. In 1860, the house on the corner of Hindsley's Place was renamed The Armoury and became the headquarters of the Sydenham Rifles. There was a drill ground at the back, on the area now being redeveloped. Political circumstances changed, and interest in the volunteer corps waned. The 8th Kent Volunteer Rifle Corps was disbanded 12 years later, in 1871. The French are still a threat...

Walk down Perry Vale passed the car park

What letters are missing beneath the Coat of Arms? (pics [12a](#) & [12b](#))

Cross the road at the junction with Dacres Road

THE MYSTERY OF SWISS COTTAGE

At the head of the junction of Perry Vale with Dacres Road is an old white building. To the side it has a plaque that indicates a date of 1797. You can just see it if you are tall enough. The house cannot be that old so it is a bit of a mystery. This building is actually two cottages: 101 Perry Vale (Swiss Cottage - pic [12c](#)) and 103 Perry Vale (Dacres Cottage - pic [12d](#)). They were built in the early 1840s & are Grade II listed buildings.

It puzzled local historians at first why they had built the cottages right on the boundary path that ran from this point up to the Standstead Road entrance to the common (you can just make the path out on the map of 1799). After all, they had the whole of the common to choose from, so why deliberately block a route and put people out of their way – particularly as they had already been incensed by land reforms?

The guess is that the parallel Westbourne Drive was already being planned and, perhaps more importantly, when a landowner provided a road this service increased the price of the plots either side of it. He would therefore ensure that his land was on either side of the road.

Carry on down Perry Vale towards the heart-rendering Valentine Court Estate

Perry Vale used to be called Perry Sough. To give you an idea of what this area was like “slough” means ‘an area of soft, muddy ground; swamp or swamp-like region.

THE DISSOLUTE IRISH LIBERTINE

A row of weather-bordered cottages once stood opposite Westbourne Drive (pic [12e](#)) and looked directly on Sydenham Common. At the beginning of the 19th Century this area was obscure enough to be an ideal hiding place for those wishing to escape the unwanted attention of the world and its bailiffs. The libertine Irish poet, Thomas Dermody, was writing in the Romantic period, and his lifestyle described as “squalidly dissolute” fitted the pattern. He wrote brilliantly in his early teens & twenties, lost his talent and fled here to escape his creditors. Some say he drank himself to death; others that he died of consumption. Whatever the cause he was only 27 when died, on 15 July 1802; in abject misery, “in a brickmaker's hut, at Perry Slough”. One of Bird's Cottages may well have been one of the “wretched hovels” in which he died. The cottages were destroyed by a bomb in 1944.

Walk towards 108 Perry Vale

Estate agents are fond of describing certain local houses as "Christmas houses" and this has puzzled some potential buyers. Of course, these houses have nothing to do with the festive season. They are the work of a local builder, E C Christmas, whose buildings have a reputation for quality and interesting detail both inside and out. He was also good at converting property into flats as can be seen opposite at "Laneside" and "Rosemont", 127 Perry Vale (pic [12f](#)), and the adjoining Tudor style property (pic [12g](#)).

FROM LAMMASTIDE TO CHRISTMAS

"Lammas" was the medieval Christian name for a religious holiday and it means "loaf-mass"; it was the day on which loaves of bread were baked from the first grain harvest and laid on the church altars as offerings. It was a day representative of "first fruits" and early harvest. "Lammas Land" was land that is common land between Lammas Day, on 1 August and Lady Day, on 25 March. Lammas common rights were first granted by King Alfred in 895 but probably the system had operated before then. It meant the commoners of the parish could graze their livestock on the fields from 1 August to 25 March. This arrangement was known as Lammas Rights.

In 1810 an Act of Parliament was passed enclosing Sydenham Common. Enclosure is the term used in England and Wales for the process by which arable farming in open field systems was ended. It is also applied to the process by which some commons (a piece of land owned by one person, but over which other local people could exercise certain traditional rights, such as allowing their livestock to graze upon it) were fenced (*enclosed*) and *deeded* or *entitled* to one or more private owners, who would then enjoy the possession and fruits of the land to the exclusion of all others.

Besides Bird's Cottages there were only a handful of other cottages in Perry Slough. Much of the land on either side was Lammas common land or half-year land. It was owned by Lord Dartmouth to the north and Mayow Wynell Mayow to the south and it was not legally available for building. This side of the road (south side) was a wide expanse of waste ground and became the key to its development. From 1774, land-hungry parishioners began to apply to the manor court for permission to enclose small parts of this waste land as the sites of cottages. Lord Dartmouth was happy to authorise these encroachments: they were on the Mayow side of the road, not his, and the freehold of the new cottages would revert to him as lord of the manor.

Mayow was furious. He protested to Dartmouth's agent about one enclosure that adjoined and bounded part of his estate – cutting his access to a lane leading to Perry Slough; and having a material effect should he in the future decide to build on the field enclosed. He was ignored and further grants of land were made until the general enclosure of 1810 dealt with all the outstanding pieces of waste land. The cottage on one of these plots, first granted in 1787, grew into a mansion known as Dartmouth Lodge.

It was demolished to make way for Ted Christmas' houses. He completed 108-116 Perry Vale, five substantial detached houses on this site, in 1901. In fact, the first house "Linstead" (pic [12i](#)) is clearly dated. Each house was individually named by Ted.

Initially hard but can you crack this riddle - what was the name of Ted's wife?

It's not very comfortable but you can sit in the bus shelter.

In 1911, Ted and his family were living opposite Windrush Lane (pic [12L](#)) at Arundale, 151 Perry Vale (pic [12i](#)). As well as the five houses you have studied, Arundale and all the other houses in that row opposite (pic [12h](#)) were built by Ted Christmas.

Lord Dartmouth's first grant of waste land in Perry Slough, made in 1774, provided the site for this house, on the corner of Windrush Lane and Perry Vale. It has grown in easy stages into the present substantial house called Rose Cottage (pics [12k](#) and [12m](#)). The central section is the oldest part of this complicated house and it is probably the oldest house in the area.

Walk up Windrush Lane through the Bampton estate to Bampton Road

MR BIG AND THE 17 YEAR OLD GARDENERS

While walking up Windrush Lane ponder on the report in the *South London Press* dated 11 January 2008:

A Cannabis factory capable of producing drugs worth £160k a year has been busted. The factory, a three-bedroom house in Perry Vale, Sydenham (*sic*) is thought to have been run by Vietnamese nationals. The house contained 100 large mature plants and 100 smaller plants. Police estimate the factory could have delivered a £40k crop every 3 months.

The property owners became suspicious after visiting the house on several occasions but never finding anyone at home. The landlord tried to enter the premises but found the locks had been changed – and immediately call 999. Police forced their way inside and found the three upstairs bedrooms contained plants and equipment needed to harvest the cannabis. The entire premises had also been rewired with sophisticated equipment to by-pass the electricity supply. The following day the Police were seeking a man and woman, both of Vietnamese appearance. Two local Blogs added to the story:

“I've often walked around Forest Hill and Sydenham and you can smell these grow houses that haven't been sealed properly or hastily set up. And I can tell the difference between it being smoked and being cultivated. It's especially noticeable the 'right side of the tracks'. I wouldn't be surprised if there were 50+ pot farms in SE23 alone”.

“There was an interesting piece about Cannabis Farms on Radio 4 recently. I seem to recall that they closed down 1500 last year but it was low on Police priorities. Invariably they either get no-one, or they pick up a couple of 'gardeners' who have been trafficked into the country and are being made to work to pay their fare. They always say they are 17 (unless their hair is really grey) so avoid the adult justice system and become a burden on the State for support. The Mr Bigs are far too wise to actually hang around the farms. Although *not PC* to mention nationality, it was stated that the Vietnamese have cornered the market. It is estimated that the amount being produced is way in excess of the UK consumption so it is assumed that cannabis is a significant invisible export for the UK”.

Turn left in to Bampton Rd, cross Inglemere Road and continue along Bampton Road

Note the line of oak trees running from the shop and along the back of the school. These marked the boundary of the fields that were originally here. There's another interesting tree in front of 53 Bampton Road (pic [13](#)). The origin of the popular English name Monkey-puzzle tree derives from its early cultivation in Britain in about 1850, when the species was still very rare in gardens and not widely known. The proud owner of a young specimen at Pencarrow garden near Bodmin in Cornwall was showing it to a group of friends, and one made the remark "It would puzzle a monkey to climb that"; as the species had no existing popular name, first 'monkey-puzzler', then 'monkey-puzzle' stuck. As a practical exercise, a monkey trying to climb one would not be so much puzzled as injured by the spiky leaf points. In

France it is known as "désespoir des singes" or "monkey's despair". However, as monkeys are not found in the species' native Chile, the question does not arise. Prior to 1850, it was called "Joseph Bank's Pine" or "Chile Pine" both somewhat puzzling as it is not a pine.

Are you fit enough to appear on CCTV? Not on your Nelly!! What colour is the animal depicted? (pic [13a](#))

Walk to the end of the road and turn right in to Dacres Road

THE TOELESS ANCIENT MARINER

Designed c1854 the statue next to the steps is of "Pacific" (pics [14](#) & [14a](#)) a Mythological figure of the Sea. This old sea dog was originally one of the 1000 or so statues that once existed inside the old Crystal Palace or the Park (most of these were either stolen or sold off in the 1950s). The statue depicts a bearded nude male reclining against a whale on waves and was possibly installed on this site by LCC or GLC but Lewisham Council has no information. Alas, the ancient mariner is a bit worse for wear, his toes have broken off and his nose is missing; as is the whale's tail. This could account for the look in his eyes!

From the Latin name *Mare Pacificum*, meaning "peaceful sea", the Pacific Ocean was named by the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan and is the largest of Earth's oceans.

Walk to the end of the road, crossing at Silverdale – take the path into the park land.

THE FORGOTTEN OX-BOW

Dacres Wood Local Nature Reserve is a small nature reserve beside the railway line between Forest Hill and Sydenham. Of major nature conservation interest are its ponds and wetlands, which are relics of the old Croydon Canal (pics [15](#) & [15a](#)). The direct route taken by the railway left a large number of the old loops of the canal as ox-bows or U-shapes, and in time most of these were drained, then filled in and built over.

By an accident of history, the loop on this site, running to the east of the railway, survived. It became the garden of a Victorian house called "Irongates"; this was one of a pair, the other called "Thriffwood". By 1895, the grounds of both houses were wooded, with a belt of trees separating the two gardens. Bacon's Atlas of 1904 quite clearly shows the loop of the old canal some 300 metres in length, although it is not clear whether or not it held water.

Thriffwood was demolished by 1952 and Irongates was replaced by a block of flats, (Homefield House) in 1962. The former garden of Irongates finally came into the ownership of Lewisham Council. Originally intended for housing, it was taken over by the parks department in 1984 and became a nature reserve in 1989.

If you have an eye for detail you will be able to name the flower-girl. (pic [15b](#))

Return to Silverdale/Dacres Rd, turning left - SE23 - walking passed Homefield House and Catling Close

Look for the house with the turret (pic [16](#)) - it has classic Queen Anne style³ features. It is now believed that it was designed and owned by local architect Thomas Aldwinckle (1845-1920). He helped design the Forest Hill Pools & Louise House.

Hennel Close is named in honour of local architect Alexander Hennell who designed Forest Hill Library. The Council could not spell his name!

THE THEOLOGIAN AND MARTYR

Forest Hill, Sydenham and Crystal Palace housed one of the major German communities in London, made up mostly of wealthy merchants, with a sprinkling of musicians and artists. The German Evangelical Church was built on in Dacres Road, in 1883. It was bombed during the war and rebuilt (pic [16a](#)).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (pic [16b](#)) was the pastor from 1933 to 1935 and the new church was named after him. While Bonhoeffer wanted to go to India to discover non-violent resistance with Gandhi, he returned instead to Nazi Germany to head a seminary for Confessing Church pastors (a Christian resistance movement) which had been made illegal by the Nazi regime. The seminary was closed at the outbreak of World War II. The Gestapo also banned him from preaching; then teaching; and finally any kind of public speaking. During this time, Bonhoeffer worked closely with numerous opponents of Adolf Hitler.

During the war, Bonhoeffer played a key leadership role in the Confessing Church, which opposed the anti-Semitic policies of Adolf Hitler. He was among those who called for wider church resistance to Hitler's treatment of the Jews. While the Confessing Church was not large, it represented a major source of Christian opposition to the Nazi government.

In 1939, Bonhoeffer joined a secret group of high-ranking military officers based in the Abwehr, or Military intelligence Office, who wanted to overthrow the National Socialist regime by killing Hitler. He was arrested in April 1943 after money used to help Jews escape to Switzerland was traced to him. He was charged with conspiracy and imprisoned in Berlin for a year and a half. After the unsuccessful 20 July 1944 assassination plot, Bonhoeffer's connections with the conspirators were discovered. He was moved to a series of prisons and concentration camps ending at Flossenbürg. Here, he was hanged at dawn on 9 April 1945, just three weeks before the liberation of the city. Also executed were his brother Klaus and his brothers-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi and Rüdiger Schleicher.

Bonhoeffer is commemorated as a theologian and martyr by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Church of England and the Church in Wales on 9 April every year.

A nearby house graciously reflects the name of a sporting legend. Who is it? (pic [16c](#))

Take the path at the side of the church and walk over the railway footbridge in to SE26 (pic [16d](#))

This road was once known as Park End and leads to the Sydenham Park Estate. Only a few of the villas & mansions remain (pic [17](#)).

THE BEAST OF SYDENHAM

The Guardian UK News reported: Residents of the blossom-filled streets of Sydenham Park were still shaking last night (22 March 2005) as a father of three told how he had been mauled by a black cat the size of a labrador.

Police armed with Taser stun guns sealed off roads in south-east London, school gates were locked and teachers warned pupils to keep away from wooded areas after Tony Holder escaped with a cuff around the face from the big cat.

Mr Holder, 36, was calling in his tabby, KitKat, at 2.15am yesterday when he spotted his pet being savaged by a 5ft-long animal. The black, panther-like creature then sprang at him in his back garden.

"I could see these huge teeth and the whites of its eyes just inches from my face. It was snarling and growling and I really believed it was trying to do some serious damage".

"I tried to get it off but I couldn't move it, it was heavier than me".

"I was scared. I really thought my life was in danger but all I was worried about was my family. It was an absolute nightmare."

As Mr Holder was being treated for scratches by ambulance staff, he saw the beast saunter past again. Armed police arrived, sealed off the streets around Mr Holder's home, loaded their stun guns with tranquillisers and searched for it with flashlights. The animal gave them the slip, but as tabloid reporters scoured the streets in safari gear brandishing butterfly nets, the Guardian picked up the scent of something big across the railway line by Catling Close [back over the footbridge]

Billy Rich, 44, was looking out of his window at 5.30am when he saw a black creature leap across the road and bound south towards Mayow Park.

"I see a ... thing," he said.

"What's he supposed to have seen?" asked his ex-wife.

"The beast of Sydenham," your correspondent explained.

"The only beast of Sydenham is him," she replied, prodding a finger at Mr Rich.

The British Big Cat Society estimates there could be 100 big cats roaming the land. A £5,000 reward has been offered for the Beast of Burford, a large black cat spotted near the Oxfordshire town. Scotland Yard confirmed the beast of Sydenham was the second serious sighting of a large black cat in south-east London in the past three years [2002 – 2005]. It has not been seen since...

Turn 2nd right in to Sydenham Park Road

Sydenham College was on the corner of Sydenham Park Road and Sydenham Park. There is now a block of flats on the site (45 Sydenham Park Rd - pic 17a). The college opened in 1860 and closed in about 1900 when the building was converted to flats, called College Mansions. The building was demolished in the late 1960s. In its day Sydenham College was Sydenham's most prestigious boys' school; its headmaster was the Rev William Taylor Jones.

There are some very grand villas in this road. The landowner & developer was Robert Harrild, of Round Hill. John Richard Jefferies (1848–1887) was an English nature writer, essayist and journalist. He wrote fiction mainly based on farming and rural life. Jefferies' formal education seems to have been sporadic. Much of his early schooling took place in Sydenham, where he lived for extended periods, at 20 Sydenham Park Road, (pic [17b](#)) with his aunt and uncle (a son of Robert Harrild) until he was about nine.

He first began work as a journalist on the North Wilts Herald in 1866, moving on to the Wiltshire and Gloucester Herald a few years later. He is best known for *After London* (1885) a book that could be best described as "post-apocalyptic fiction"; after some sudden and unspecified catastrophe has depopulated England, the countryside reverts to nature, and the few survivors to a quasi-medieval way of life. The first chapters consist solely of a loving description of nature reclaiming England: fields becoming overrun by forest, domesticated animals running wild, roads and towns becoming overgrown, the hated London reverting to lake and poisonous swampland. The rest of the story is a straightforward adventure/quest set many years later in the wild landscape and society; but the opening chapters set an example for many later science fiction stories.

Sydenham Park was laid out on the site of the large Sydenham reservoir drained in 1836. It belonged to the Croydon Canal Company, providing top-up water for the canal and also recreational facilities (swimming, skating & duck-shooting). If you stand at the junction with Longfield Crescent, (pic [17c](#)) you are standing on what would have been the embankment that formed the dam of the reservoir, looking down to the Croydon Canal itself, with the reservoir to the back of you. The road slopes up (pic [17d](#)) the other side of Sydenham Park Road to The Peak and also to Dartmouth Road; the reservoir's embankments. Most of the reservoir was filled in but a few clues remain, as in the difference in ground level between the garden of 2 Sydenham Park Road (pic [17e](#)) and Dartmouth Road.

Walk to the top of Sydenham Park Rd and carefully cross Dartmouth Road

On the corner of Round Hill & Dartmouth Rd is Round Hill Lodge (pic [18](#)) probably built in the 1820s.

Turn right along Dartmouth Road at Round Hill Lodge – you are now leaving SE26

THE GREAT GLEBE LAND GIVEAWAY

Holy Trinity School (pic [18c](#)), in the Gothic Revival-style (5), was built in 1874 'to promote the religious education of the parish and neighbourhood' and provides a good example of a late-Victorian national school. The single-storey building has a T plan with a central hall flanked by three classrooms on either side. The roof features a central bellcot, a shingle roof and iron weathervane. It is a Grade II listed building.

On 22 September 2006, Lewisham Council and English Heritage announced that "to safeguard the future of the it, Forest Hill Library (pic [18d](#)) was to undergo refurbishment, as the "Well-Loved" landmark enters its second century in community use". The Library was designed by local architect Alexander Hennell in the Art Nouveau style¹. However, on the Forest Hill Community website, the Librarian informs us that Alexander Hennell's design is in the "Art & Craft"³ tradition. So who knows?

Built in 1901, this Grade II listed building is truly a local treasure, both inside and out. It is the second purpose-built and publicly funded library in Lewisham. Note the interesting terracotta detailing on the exterior of the building; the cherubs and the lettering are classic Art Nouveau, as is the floral decorations on the windows and doors. The Council spent approximately £1million on the comprehensive renovation, which included thorough structural work on the roof and ceiling. The heating, lighting and power supply systems were also overhauled. In line with the Disability Discrimination Act, access was improved at the front and back of the building, along with the accessibility of the toilets and signage throughout the library.

A Boys' Industrial Home had been opened at 17 Rojack Road on 3 May 1873 "for the reception and industrial training of destitute boys". The purpose of the home was to ensure that "a boy is rescued from the perils of the street, fed, clothed, housed, educated and taught a trade - shoe-mending for the older boys while the younger ones made bundles of firewood to sell, and finally started in life with a fair prospect of doing well". The Girls' Industrial Home at Louise House (pic [18e](#)) was opened in 1891. Designed by Thomas Aldwinckle (1845-1920) a local architect, the Girls' Industrial Home gave girls the skills needed to become domestic servants or laundresses.

Forest Hill Pools (pics [18f](#) & [18g](#)) were considered the oldest substantially intact working baths to survive in the London area. Although they nearly didn't make it, they lasted to celebrate their 120th anniversary in 2005. The Earl of Dartmouth opened them on Saturday 2 May 1885. The foundation stone was laid a year earlier, in a tent erected on the site. 1700 school children marched along Dartmouth Road to the tent, where they were each given a bun and an orange. 7 commissioners were appointed to obtain funds and land, and to build two swimming pools with public baths. From 1819 the large plot of land on which Holy Trinity School, Forest Hill Library, Louise House and the Swimming Pools, now stand had been glebe land (land owned by the parish church) used to provide income for the vicars of Lewisham. Fortunately, in 1882, the vicar of Lewisham was The Hon Canon Augustus Legge, one of the pools commissioners, and he made part of this plot available "at a price much lower than other land about". The architects appointed were Wilson and Aldwinckle.

Two very different men did more than any others to bring about the creation of the pools: the first was Theophilus William Williams - a man of modest origins, working his way up from messenger to bank manager. He entered local politics, becoming Lewisham's first mayor in 1900. The second man, The Hon Augustus Legge, on the other hand, was a younger son of the Earl of Dartmouth. He was vicar of Lewisham until 1891 when he was appointed Bishop of Litchfield. Williams and/or Legge were involved in almost every major local project undertaken during the last quarter of the 19th century.

At £9,000, the building was considered remarkable value for money. The pools were described as "the cheapest for the accommodation afforded, as well as the handsomest, in the United Kingdom" and *The Builder* said, "Unnecessary expense and all extraneous ornament have been most carefully avoided ... the architects have succeeded very well in giving a certain degree of picturesque effect to buildings of a generally plain and practical character". In today's terms, the building would have cost in the region of £600,000.

We have a vivid illustration of the rigid class system in Victorian England, one of the commissioners said that the baths would promote "the comfort and health of the people "reducing" poverty, crime and many evils. The more they promoted healthy exercise the more virtuous the people would become."

There were two entrances to the building. To the left was the entrance for "1st class males", who had their own waiting room and their own pool (the left-hand pool). This was mirrored on the right side, where "2nd class males" had their waiting room and pool. Even up to the day the pools closed, filtered water, using the original filters, flowed first to the left-hand pool before flowing into the right!

Women had their own entrance, on the right side of the building, where the "females ticket office" still survives. There was very definitely no mixed bathing; men could use the pools morning and evening, while women used them during the day.

Forest Hill Swimming Baths were closed in 2005 due to health and safety concerns surrounding its roof and plumbing. On 13 February 2008, the Council took the difficult

decision that, due to the huge cost involved, the pools were beyond repair. The Pools and Louise House will be demolished and replaced by new 21st century leisure facilities.

Walk towards the corner of Dartmouth Road with London Road

Penned by Ian Fleming – but who sang the theme tune? (pic [18h](#))

“THE DANCING BEAR”

The Beckenham Journal, 1 May 1882, reported a case of animal cruelty brought by William Hollis, an RSPCA Inspector and heard at Greenwich Police Court:

‘On Saturday April 8th, Jean Baique, 33, and Francis Faut, 30, Frenchmen, described as bear-performers, were charged before Mr de Rutzen with cruelty to a bear, by beating it with sticks – William Hollis, an Inspector of the RSPCA, said on the previous afternoon he saw the prisoners with their bear in Dartmouth Road, Sydenham, surrounded by a crowd. One of the prisoners was leading the bear by a chain, which was passed through its nose, evidently causing it great agony, as blood was flowing. He also struck it a number of times on the shins with a stick thicker than a broom-handle, in order to make it stand on its hind legs and dance. With the last blow he broke the stick’ (they were fined 40 shillings). (pic [18i](#))

The eagle has a nice nest egg – you can bank on it. But initially who owned this building? (pics [19](#) & [19a](#))

At the corner of Dartmouth Road turn left into London Road

“MAN, WOMAN AND SIN”

Designed in the Art Deco² “Egyptian” style, the Capitol Cinema (pics [20a](#) & [20b](#)) was built in 1928-29 for London & Southern Cinemas and designed by cinema architect and garden designer John Stanley Beard. Art Deco expressed excitement over a stunning find. In 1922, archaeologist Howard Carter and his sponsor, Lord Carnarvon, thrilled the world with their discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen. Soon a fascination for Egypt was expressed in clothing, jewellery, furniture, graphic design and architecture.

The cinema opened on 11 February 1929 with John Gilbert in "Man Woman and Sin" (pic [20c](#)). As it was designed for silent movies, sound equipment soon had to be installed. It originally had a Compton theatre organ which, on the opening night, was played by cinema organist Edgar Peto. There was and still is a cafe for the convenience of patrons. The stage was 22 feet deep and with three dressing rooms it allowed for variety shows to be staged.

It was taken over by Associated British Cinemas (ABC) from July 1933 and they operated it for the remainder of its cinematic life. During the 1950s, occasional variety shows were still produced/ The Compton organ was removed in the late 50's.

It was re-named ABC in December 1968 and closed on 13 October 1973. The building stood empty for several years until it opened as a Mecca Bingo Club on 23rd February 1978. Bingo ceased in December 1996 and the building again stood empty and unloved. It re-opened again in April 2001 as part of the J.D. Wetherspoon chain of pubs and is now called "The Capital". It is a Grade II Listed building – and one of the few on this walk that you can pop inside to take a look at the decor – go on – have a look!

At Kings Garth (pic [21](#)) & Princes Garth (pic [21b](#)), 27 & 29 London Road, note the Art Nouveau¹ style stained glass front door (pic [21a](#)); and the iron railings on the balconies. There's a plaque on the wall of No. 29 giving a brief history. "Garth" is archaic for a yard, garden, or paddock another reminder that this was once part of Sydenham Common.

To end your walk, why not call back into the Lemon Grove for some well deserved refreshments?

Footnotes:

- (1) **Art nouveau** is best described as feminine. It was a decorative-art movement centred in Western Europe. It began in the 1880s as a reaction against the historical emphasis of mid-19th-century art, but did not survive World War I. The style was richly ornamental and asymmetrical, featuring reverse curved lines reminiscent of twining plant tendrils & flowers. It is filled with symbolism, often of an erotic nature.
- (2) **Art deco** celebrated the stream-lines masculine speed of the modern world. It has bold, angular shapes and the glorification of the machine-age. This style of design originated in French luxury goods shortly before World War I, becoming internationally popular during the 1920s and 30s. Art deco is characterised by long, thin forms, curving surfaces, and geometric patterning.
- (3) The **Arts and Crafts Movement** began in 1867 paralleling the Aesthetic Movement and the Queen Anne revival. This style of architecture and decor focused on hand-crafted, anti-industrial processes, pruned of unnecessary decoration. The **Queen Anne style** lasted from 1860-1900. It included asymmetrical design, intricate decorative woodwork, prominent porches, a steep roof with projecting gables and rambling floor plans. A prominent characteristic is the corner tower or turret, although it is not always on the corner, and sometimes not present at all.
- (4) **Regency** was the period 1811-20 when, due to George III's insanity, the Prince of Wales (Later George IV) was made regent. The style follows closely on from the neo-classical Georgian Style of architecture, adding an elegance and lightness of touch. **The Georgian style** takes its name from the four Kings named George (1720-1840) but including William IV. A major difference between Georgian and Regency architecture is that Regency architecture is much more ornate, inspired by ancient Greece. Many have a **portico** - a porch leading to the entrance of a building, with a roof structure over a walkway, supported by columns, pillars or enclosed by walls. The arched doorway often has steps leading to it and is usually coloured black. In both Regency and Georgian architecture the size of the windows decrease as you look up the house. The smallest windows are on the top where the servants lived. Elegant wrought iron balconies and bow windows also came into fashion as part of this style.
- (5) The Gothic Revival is an architectural movement which began in the 1840s in England. This style sought to revive medieval forms, in contrast to the classical styles which were popular in Regency times.