

FOREST HILL HISTORY WALK & TREASURE HUNT

Brief History

Over 200 years ago, Forest Hill and Sydenham were covered by the Great North Wood (only fragments now remain). Slowly it was disappearing, the Navy built ships; and a lot of trees were lost to woodmen from London or charcoal burners from Croydon. It was a rural place with a few cottages among the woods and along a rough road from Northwood (now Norwood) that ran through 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.

Nearby Sydenham was known only as a "genteel hamlet of Lewisham" - famed for its sylvan retreats, charming prospects and for its medicinal springs. 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 Sydenham Common. 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. This drove the locals away from the area in favour of landowners. 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.

Canals became popular for transporting goods. The Croydon Canal Company was formed in 1801 to build the Deptford to Croydon canal. Nine miles long, it was formally opened on 22 October 1809. The canal did not prosper as competition came in the form of the railways; it closed in 1836. Sydenham and Forest Hill quickly grew after the opening of the Croydon Railway, in 1839; and again more rapidly after the opening of the Crystal Palace, in 1854.

Leave the Lemon Grove and turn left along London Road

On your left is Upton Leaze – which means meadow-land or land let alone. The name possibly derived from when this was part of Sydenham Common.

Walking along London Road you come to a white house called Forest Lodge (opposite the junction with Honor Oak Road). Family members of A & G Taylor lived here. The Taylor brothers were Victorian photographers who made their fortune mass producing "Cartes de Viste" - a popular form of portrait postcards.

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

The Alaskan totem pole was unveiled on 29 June 1985. On the top is an eagle and beneath it is a girl with a bag and a grizzly bear. It depicts a legend of a girl who married a bear. The Museum was founded by Frederick Horniman a tea merchant. He pulled down his home (Surrey House) and built the museum for his huge collection. He donated it and the gardens to the people of London. Note the Art Nouveau **(1)** & Arts & Craft style **(3)** of the building, together with the beautiful mosaic.

What was Fred's middle name?

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, following the enclosure of Sydenham Common. 'Sydenham New Town' was another early name for the Honor Oak Road development.

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 is a Georgian **(4)** house built c1796. 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. There are indications that the north wing was originally a stable block. Note the portico **(4)** entrance.

Next door is Ashberry Cottage – another Georgian house. There is a plaque on the front that claims that William, Duke of Clarence (who became William IV) and his mistress, Mrs Dorothea Jordan, 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. 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 on porch railings of their homes. William IV was known as the "Sailor King" in his own lifetime. Strangely, William also had a pineapple-shaped head. William & Mrs 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, Mrs Jordan died in poverty in 1816. The cottage on this site was demolished to make way for the present house, built in the 1820s. Ashberry cottage is inaccurately named after Joseph Ashbarry, the owner in the 1830s and 1840s.

How many pots are on top of the arched chimney?

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 has spectacular views and in front of you are the North Downs. Note the gables on top of some of the villas in this road. If you stand with your back to No. 37 you can see a weathervane.

When was one of the villas built?

The more modern houses (c1930s) from No.27 downwards display beautiful art deco **(2)** style stained glass doors and windows. Also look at the Art Nouveau **(1)** glass front door at No.28 – and look who's in the garden, at No. 22; no doubt she's wishing it was a bit warmer. 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 would have been when first built.

Turn left at the junction with Devonshire Road

Pillar-boxes first appeared in 1852. They were the idea of the writer, Anthony Trollope, a Post Office surveyor. The most famous Victorian pillar-box was named after its designer, J.W. Penfold. One hundred of the distinctive hexagonal boxes still exist, including this one.

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. He claimed to be the owner of the largest collection of modern autographs in the world and proclaimed himself "The Autograph King". He was, W Reginald Bray, of 135 Devonshire Road. He was a clerk in the City and each evening, he would write his cards, and post them. No doubt in the Penfold pillar-box almost directly outside his house.

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

Name the Elizabethan holding court here.

Look out for the postmen's office. During the 1930s Reginald Bray appeared on the radio programme "In Town Tonight", as "The Human Letter". Apparently, he posted himself. 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.

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

The old public loo (now called the Old Washrooms) on the corner of David's Road has been converted into a house.

Cross David's Road

The Croydon Canal, was constructed through here in 1809 but it was not a commercial success. It was bought by the London & Croydon Railway Company who constructed their railway roughly 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 is the side of a lock and the raised pavement is the former towpath. The London and Croydon Railway opened in 1839. The tracks were cutting through open country and Dartmouth Arms was the original name for the station. Within 15 years Forest Hill was established as the name for the district and the station, from which hundreds of houses radiated. The 2003 mural which depicts scenes from Forest Hill's history is the work of local artist James Salisbury.

What was the number of the tram?

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

Whose shop used to be here?

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

Opposite is a new development of flats called Forest Hill Central. (There is also a seat by the station wall). On this site there was a two storey cream-painted building, built in about 1845. Not long after, there were fears that the French were planning to invade England. The Government therefore encouraged the formation of local volunteer forces. A committee was formed and 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.

Walk down Perry Vale

What letters are missing beneath the Coat of Arms?

Cross the road at the junction with Dacres Road

At the head of the junction of Perry Vale with Dacres Road is an old white building. To the side it has a plaque with the date 1797 but it is not that old. It is actually two cottages: 101 Perry Vale (Swiss Cottage) and 103 Perry Vale (Dacres Cottage). They were built in the early 1840s & are Grade II listed buildings. It is thought they were built at the time the common was enclosed.

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. A row of weather-bordered houses called Bird's Cottages once stood in Perry Slough, opposite Westbourne Drive and looked directly on Sydenham Common. The 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 some say drank himself to death, at the age of 27. He died near here, on 15 July 1802, “in abject misery in Perry Slough”. One of the Bird’s Cottages may well have been one of the “wretched hovels” in which he died. The cottages were destroyed by a WW2 bomb in 1944.

Carry on down Perry Vale towards 108 Perry Vale

Local builder, E C Christmas, was good at converting property into flats examples are “Laneside” and “Rosemont”, 127 Perry Vale, and the adjoining Tudor style property. Ted Christmas’ best-known early building development is between Perry Vale and South Road. In 1901, he completed 108-116 Perry Vale, five substantial detached houses. The original cottage on this site grew into a mansion known as Dartmouth Lodge. It was demolished to make way for Ted’s Houses. Each house was individually named by him.

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.

On the corner of Windrush Lane and Perry Vale is Rose Cottage c1774, extensively altered since the cottage was built but probably the oldest house in the area.

Walk up Windrush Lane through the Bampton estate to Bampton Road

While walking up Windrush Lane ponder on a report in the *South London Press* dated 11 January 2008: A Cannabis factory capable of producing drugs worth £160k a year was busted. The factory, a three-bedroom house in Perry Vale, was 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.

Turn left into 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 a Monkey-puzzle tree in front of 53 Bampton Road. The origin of the popular English name derives from about 1850, when the species was very rare in gardens. The proud owner of a young specimen 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 ‘monkey-puzzle’ stuck.

Are you fit enough to appear on CCTV? Not on your Nelly! What colour is the animal depicted?

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

The statue next to the steps is of “Pacific” a Mythological figure of the Sea. It is probably one of the 1000 or so statues that once existed inside the old Crystal Palace or its grounds. It was possibly installed on this site by LCC or GLC but Lewisham Council has no information.

Walk to the end of the road, crossing at Silverdale – take the path at the left-hand side of the Homefield House flats.

Dacres Wood is a small nature reserve beside the railway line between Forest Hill and Sydenham. Of interest are its ponds and wetlands, which are relics of the old Croydon Canal. The direct route taken by the railway left a large number of old loops of the canal and in time most of these were drained then filled in and built over. The loop on this site,

however, survived becoming part of the garden of a Victorian house called "Irongates". By 1895, the grounds were covered by a belt of trees. In 1962, Irongates was replaced by a block of flats, (Homefield House). The former garden came into the ownership of Lewisham Council and was taken over by the parks department, becoming a nature reserve in 1989.

If you have an eye for detail you will be able to name the flower-girl.

Return to Dacres Road and turn left passed Homefield House and Catling Close

Look for the house with the turret - it has classic Queen Anne style **(3)** 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 Alexander Hennell the local architect who designed Forest Hill Library.

The German Evangelical Church was built in Dacres Road, in 1883. It was bombed during the war, and rebuilt. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the pastor from 1933 to 1935 and the church was named after him at the end of World War II. 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 Germany. He was arrested in April 1943 after money used to help Jews escape to Switzerland was traced to him. After the unsuccessful 20 July 1944 assassination plot, Bonhoeffer's connections with the conspirators were discovered. He was executed on 9 April 1945, just three weeks before the liberation of the camp. 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?

Take the path at the side of the church and walk over the railway footbridge in to SE26

This road was once known as Park End and leads to the Sydenham Park Estate. Only a few of the villas & mansions remain. On the night of 22 March 2005, Police armed with Taser stun guns and flashlights sealed off roads in Sydenham Park after local man, Tony Holder, claimed a black, panther-like creature attacked him in his back garden. 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 [2002-05]. It has not been seen since...

Turn 2nd right into Sydenham Park Road

Sydenham College was on the corner of Sydenham Park Road and Sydenham Park. 45 Sydenham Park Road is now on the site. The college opened in 1860 and closed in about 1900. In its day Sydenham College was Sydenham's most prestigious boys' school; its headmaster was the Rev William Taylor Jones. It was demolished in the late 1960s.

John Richard Jefferies was an English nature writer, essayist and journalist. He wrote fiction mainly based on farming and rural life. Some of his early schooling took place in Sydenham, where he lived for extended periods, at 20 Sydenham Park Road, with his aunt and uncle until he was about nine. He is best known for *After London* (1885) a book best described as "post-apocalyptic fiction" which 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, 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 to Dartmouth Road; the reservoir's embankments.

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

On the corner of Round Hill & Dartmouth Rd is Round Hill Lodge probably built in the 1820s.

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

Holy Trinity School, in the Gothic Revival-style **(5)** was built in 1874 and provides a good example of a late-Victorian national school. It 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.

The Library was designed by local architect Alexander Hennell. Built in 1901, this Grade II listed building has interesting terracotta detailing on the exterior of the building; the cherubs and the lettering are classic Art Nouveau **(1)** as is the floral decorations on the windows and doors. The Council recently spent approximately £1million on the comprehensive renovation.

The Girls' Industrial Home at Louise House was opened in 1891. Designed by Thomas Aldwinckle a local architect, the Girls' Industrial Home gave destitute girls the skills needed to become domestic servants or laundresses.

Forest Hill Pools were considered the oldest substantially intact working baths in the London area, celebrating their 120th anniversary in 2005. The Earl of Dartmouth opened them on 2 May 1885. Commissioners were appointed to obtain funds and land, and to build them. From 1819 the large plot of land on which Holy Trinity School, the Library, Louise House and the Swimming Pools, now stand had been land owned by the parish church. 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 for the pools 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 also became 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 and was later 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 building was closed in 2005 due to health and safety concerns surrounding its roof and plumbing. 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?

'On Saturday 8 April 1882, two Frenchmen, described as bear-performers, were charged with cruelty to a bear, by beating it with sticks. The previous afternoon they were seen with their bear in Dartmouth Road, surrounded by a crowd. One of the prisoners was leading the bear by a chain, which was passed through its bloodied nose, evidently causing it great agony. He also struck it a number of times on the shins with a stick thicker than a broom-

handle, to make it stand on its hind legs and dance. With the last blow he broke the stick.' They were fined 40 shillings.

The eagle has a nice nest egg – you can bank on it. But initially who owned this building?

At the corner of Dartmouth Road turn left into London Road

Designed in the Art Deco **(2)** “Egyptian” style, the Capitol Cinema was built in 1928-29 for London & Southern Cinemas and designed by 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". It was re-named ABC in December 1968 and later became a Mecca Bingo Club. The building was re-opened again in April 2001 as part of Wetherspoon chain of pubs. It is a Grade II Listed building.

At Kings Garth, 29 London Road, a wall plaque gives a brief history. Note the Art Nouveau **(1)** style stained glass front door. Just out of interest “Garth” is archaic for a yard, garden, or paddock - perhaps another link with 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 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 looked up the house. The smallest windows are on the top floor 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.

A lot more information about what you have seen and read, together with pictures and the answers to the treasure hunt, can be found at www.se23.com