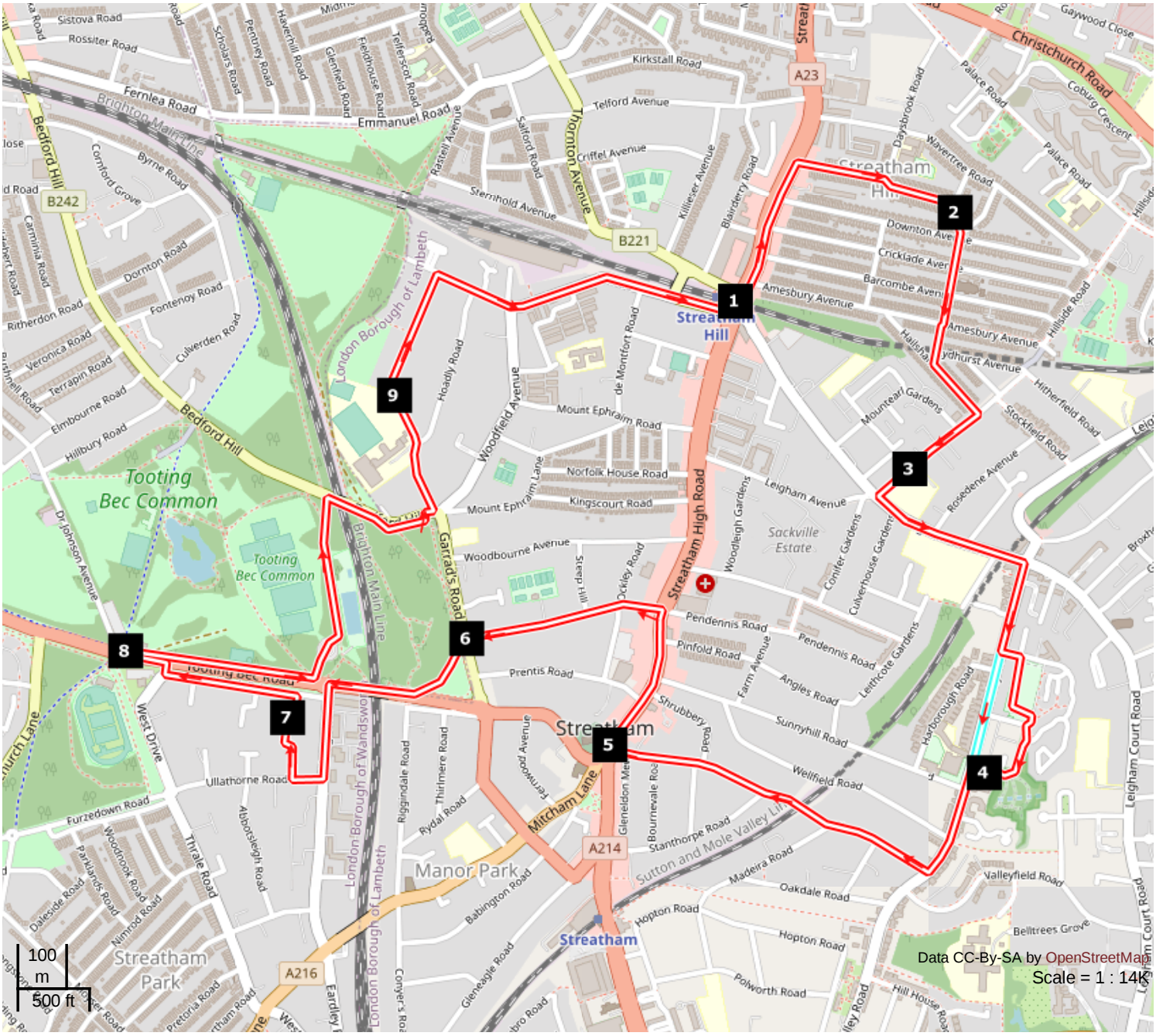
North Streatham’s Literary Links

Starts at Streatham Hill Station SW2 4SA

2 hours 30 minutes | 4.9miles 8.0km | Leisurely

ID: 0.13005 | Developed by: The Streatham Festival & The Streatham Society |

From Goldilocks to The Devil Rides Out - Enjoy a stroll around the north of Streatham visiting locations connected to it's famous literati.



Main Route | Alternative Route | Point of Interest | 4 Waypoint

The Ramblers is Britain’s walking charity. We work to safeguard the footpaths, countryside and other places where we all go walking. We encourage people to walk for their health and wellbeing. To become a member visit www.ramblers.org.uk

Starts at

Streatham Hill Station SW2 4SA

Ends at

Streatham Hill Station SW2 4SA

Getting there

Streatham Hill Station is in zone 3. Trains run twice an hour to Victoria via Balham (Northern Line), and West Croydon. Trains also run hourly to London Bridge Brixton (Victoria Line) is connected by numerous and frequent bus routes.

Check train times and buses on //tfl.gov.uk/plan-a-journey/

Route instructions

[1] Start by crossing over the dual carriageway and following the main road left (Starbucks will be opposite) until you reach Wyatt Park Road where you turn right.
Along the way on the opposite side of the street was the Locarno Dance Hall (Starbucks), a nationally famous venue where the famous Lambeth Walk originated. The impressive columnar façade above the M&S Food Hall belonged originally to the 2,431 seat Gaumont Palace Cinema which later became the largest bowling alley in Europe, then added the Zap Zone on the first floor, where Princes William and Harry regularly played games with laser guns. The Streatham Hill Theatre still proudly stands. This Grade Two listed building saw many star-studded plays, opera, ballet and pantomime but is currently closed. On the corner of Barcombe Avenue (87 Streatham Hill) is Balfe's bikes which was once the stationery shop of the "First Female Press photographer", Christina Broom, allowed into the inner circle of the Suffragette movement and famous for her stunning pictures of the suffragette campaigners.
Near the end of Wyatt Park Road you'll find number 81a.

81a Wyatt Park Road is the house in which Nobel Prize Winner VS Naipaul lodged for two and a half years, from mid-1958 to the end of 1961. Most of his book, A House of Mr Biswas, which won him the 2001 Nobel Prize for literature, was written here, and he also wrote his first travel book, The Middle Passage, while living in Streatham.
He wrote "Often, out in the Streatham Hill streets, momentarily away from the book, shopping perhaps, I thought: If someone were to offer me a million pounds on condition that I leave the book unfinished, I would turn the money down.... The two years spent on this novel in Streatham Hill remain the most consuming, the most fulfilled, the happiest years of my life. They were my Eden."

[2] Turn right at the end of the road into Normanhurst Road and continue over the mini roundabout along Faygate Road.
On the left of Faygate Road is The Community of St Margaret the Queen Church, a listed building built in 1899 and designed by Plumbe and Harvey which is now the warehouse for the Norwood and Brixton Food Bank.
On the wall on the side of a house opposite is a plaque marking the area as "The Leigham Court Estate Conservation Area" The ABCD roads of terracotta houses of Amesbury, Barcombe, Crickdale and Downton roads were built for the Artizans, Labourers and General Dwelling Company. The estate of 2,000 dwellings was built 1889-1928 in the 66 acres grounds of Leigham Court House, a mansion designed by John Papworth, first owned by John Fuller, part owner of Boodles Club, and later by John Tredwell, an engineer who worked with Isambard Kingdom Brunel.
Turning left at the end along Hailsham Avenue brings you to Mount Nod Road. Stroll right along here to find

number 35 (which is next to the Streatham Ambulance Station).

35 Mount Nod Road is where the American-born novelist of detective fiction Raymond Thornton Chandler lived. Chandler was considered to be a founder of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction, publishing seven novels in his lifetime, and all but Playback have been made into motion pictures. In the year before his death, he was elected president of the Mystery Writers of America.

[3] Pass the modern buildings of Dunraven School at the end of the road and turn left. Walk along Leigham Court Road with the main Dunraven buildings on the right (international supermodel Naomi Campbell was a pupil here) before turning right at the lights along Valley Road.
Leigham Court Road was a premier road in the area and the home to numerous famous people including Hollywood Actress and Film Director Ida Lupino. Florence Bravo and her Jamaican-born lover Dr Charles Gulley had separate addresses in this stretch of the road and were implicated in the Victorian murder mystery of Florence's husband, Charles Bravo who was poisoned at the "Priory" in Balham
Take the second turning on the left, Curtis Field Road. (Note: to avoid the steps in the wood, skip the next bit and stay on Valley Road to Namba Ray Close and continue the main route at [4]). Walk along Curtis Field Road and head for the diagonally opposite corner of the playing field. Walk to the left of the red flats and when South Oak Road bends left you continue on along the footpath into the green oasis of the Unigate Wood Nature Reserve. This area was the site of Curtis Brother's diary, later taken over by Unigate. Follow the path when it curves right to exit down the steps into Namba Roy Close.

The close was named after Namba Roy, a Jamaican novelist, born in Kingston, Jamaica who settled in South London after WW2. Black Albino (1961), his first novel, is based on an episode of violent disunity among the Maroons during the eighteenth century. Following his discharge from the Merchant Navy in 1944, he lived in London, working in various capacities and producing his highly regarded paintings and sculptures, of which he exhibited both in London and Paris. A further novel entitled No Black Sparrows appeared posthumously in 1989; its narrative of abandoned children who live as pedlars on the streets of Kingston compellingly evokes the society of colonial Jamaica in the 1930s.

[4] Continue to the main road, Valley Road, and go left. The tall chimneys of Sunnyhill School can be seen on the right. The actor Hywell Bennet was a pupil and, on the 10 May 1945, just 2 days after VE day the school had a visit from the King, the Queen and the two princesses.
Well Close on the left leads to the historic Well House, now Spa Court. The mineral wells and spa from here contributed to the significant growth of Streatham Village. Frances Barber Close (see later) is up here on the right
Take the third right, Gleneldon Road, and follow this for about half a mile. At 129 Gleneldon Road, Edward Butler lived, an engineer who produced an early three-wheeled automobile, the Butler Petrol Cycle, which some claim as the first British car. As you walk over the railway bridge you will see the newly formed (2018) Railside Community Garden on your right (railsidegarden.org.uk).
Cross to the far side of Streatham High Road to reach St Leonard's Church. (For step free access to the churchyard you will need to go round to the left to the main entrance). At this point there are a number of cafes and pubs if you need to re-fuel.

St Leonard's Church, a classic Streatham landmark was frequented by some high-profile literati.

The acclaimed eighteenth-century novelist Jane Austen, writer of Pride and Prejudice, Emma and Sense and Sensibility to name a few, made several visits to Streatham to see her friend, Catherine Bigg-Wither, the wife of the then Rector of Streatham (St Leonard's), the Rev. Herbert Hill, who was also the founder of St Leonard's School. Six months before she died, Jane wrote to Catherine's sister, Alethea, who was

staying at Streatham Rectory, mentioning by name each of the Rector's children:
"I hope this will find all the Streatham party well, neither carried away by the Floods nor rheumatic through the Damps. Kind love & good wishes for a happy New Year to you all, from all our four here. Give our love to the little Boys, if they can be persuaded to remember us. We have not at all forgot Herbert's & Errol's fine Countenances. Georgiana is very pretty I dare say. How does Edward like school? I suppose his holidays are not over yet."

Another visitor to the Rectory was the nephew of Rev. Southey. Robert Southey was the Poet Laureate and wrote Goldilocks and the Three Bears in 1837 to entertain his uncle's children.

A serving PM, Lord John Russell, brother to the rector Wriothesley Russell, drafted the Reform Bill in the Rectory Library

The Churchyard contains the graves of many eminent Streatham residents and a number with connections to the Royal Family; Arthur Helps, Dean of the Privy Council and Author, who introduced Charles Dickens to Queen Victoria and edited her Highland Journal, Robert Garrard, the Crown Jeweller, William Coulthurst, a senior partner of Coutts bank, bankers to the Queen and Emund Tylney, Master of the Revels to Elizabeth 1st. Tylney appeared in the film "Shakespeare in Love", played by Streatham-born actor Simon Callow.

[5] Turning right and moving further north along the High Street, we reach Becmead Avenue at the traffic lights. Strolling along here we find 1 Becmead Avenue on the right, once the home of Dennis Yeats Wheatley.

Dennis Wheatley was an English writer whose prolific output of thrillers and occult novels made him one of the world's best-selling authors from the 1930s through the 1960s. His Gregory Sallust series was one of the main inspirations for Ian Fleming's James Bond stories. He lived at a number of locations in Streatham and the only house still in existence is his last residence in Streatham. Ironically 1 Becmead Avenue, once the residence of the author of The Devil Rides Out, today is the St Leonard's Church rectory.

[6] At the far end of Becmead Avenue, cross Garrad's Road on to Tooting Bec Common. Garrad's Road was once known as "Millionaires Road' and the large mansions were owned by people such Sir Ronald Wates of Wates Builders and Agnes Parr whose husband was a banker with Parr Bank.
Either go left and stay on the pavement as it curves right to go along Tooting Bec Road or cut the corner by crossing over the horse track which is flanked by two rows of ancient trees. These were planted by Robert Forth and Elizabeth I is said to have ridden here on a visit to his Streatham home. An elm tree once stood in this area of the common where Dr Samuel Johnson is believed to have rested on his way to attend services at St Leonard's.
Cut across the Common, keeping the denser trees on your right. On reaching Tooting Bec Road, turn right and cross the railway. At the traffic lights cross the main road into Aldrington Road which has been built in the grounds of Streatham Park. Take a right into Ullathorne Road where the Methodist minister Lord Soper was born and then the first right into Colson Way. Just past the convenience store, look for a Streatham Society plaque, on a house across the road, commemorating Dr Johnson, the Thrales and Streatham Place and marking the former site of the building.

Streatham Park/Place, a Georgian country mansion was demolished in 1863 but was visited by many notable 18th-century people. It was the 'hang-out spot' of the 'Streatham Worthies', a literary and cultural

circle of friends of the notorious socialite and writer, Hester Thrale.

Amongst the group were the following writers:
• Oliver Goldsmith - Irish novelist and playwright, best known for his novel The Vicar of Wakefield
• Giuseppe Marc'Antonio Baretti - literary critic and translator.
• Dr Samuel Johnson - famous author of A Dictionary of the English Language, considered the pre-eminent British Dictionary before The Oxford English Dictionary was released 150 years later. He was also a lexicographer who had an apartment at the house
• Edmund Burke - A philosopher, who became widely regarded in the 20th Century as the philosophical founder of modern conservatism.
• Fanny Burney - satirical novelist, diarist and playwright and daughter of "Worthy" Dr Charles Burney and friend of Hester was also frequent visitor to the Thrale's residence
• Sir Joshua Reynolds - also a Streatham Worthy, painted each of the friends and their paintings hung in the library of the house. He also painted Francis Barber, the servant and heir of Dr Johnson. Francis Barber Close is off Well Close

After Hester Thrale had remarried and left Streatham, the house was rented - one occupant was the Prime minister The Earl of Shelburne, William Petty.
The area of the Streatham Park estate is now a conservation area and extends as far as Ambleside Avenue on the Lambeth side.

[7] Follow Colson Way to North Drive and turn left. Both the avenues of trees from the Georgian estate and much of the Victorian era tree planting survive, as well as some remaining pre-war buildings including Dixcote, 8 North Drive, a rare urban example of a house by the Arts and Crafts architect Charles Voysey. The home was once the home of Richard Essex, an MP and wallpaper manufacturer (Dixcote meaning Dick's Cottage). It has been an Orphanage and is now a family home.
Take the first right back to Tooting Bec Road, turn left and follow the main road to the traffic lights (notice a set of buttons high up for Horse riders to stop the traffic) with the Athletics track on the left. Cross the road on to Tooting Bec Common. The road to the left is Dr Johnson Avenue, previously called The Avenue, which marks the boundary of the parish of Streatham and the boundary of Tooting Bec and Tooting Graveney Commons.
The avenue of trees are thought to have been planted to celebrate Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Tooting in 1600.
There is a drinking fountain (inscription engraved by Joseph Allen) by the car park close to the traffic lights in memory of Joseph James Jones of 58 Streathbourne Road who left £24k to encourage the playing of games by boys in the locality.
The poet Thomas Hardy lived locally in Trinity Road for a short period and he refers to the area in his poem "Beyond the Last Lamp (Near Tooting Common").

[8] Walk back along the horse track beside Tooting Bec Road towards the railway bridge which was crossed earlier. Enjoy the views of the common land, once owned by the Dukes of Bedford and often appearing as Streatham Common on 19th century maps.
At the traffic lights walk through the car park and along the path at the far end to walk past the Lido (blue building). The outdoor pool opened on 28th July 1906 and holds 1 million gallons of water. At Bedford Hill turn right and cross back over the railway. Walk along the edge of the Common with Streatham Woods on the right to the pedestrian crossing
Cross over and walk down Abbotswood Road. On the left is Streatham and Clapham High School, which

novelist Angela Carter attended. Opposite the school is Hoadley Road where comedian Roy Hudd and pop star Malcolm Vaughan lived, and where Michael Caine bought a house for his mother.

The novelist Angela Carter attended Streatham and Clapham High School in the 1950s. Angela Carter's novels and short stories remain highly influential for their dark, humorous and often surreal portrayal of feminist ideas. Her most well-known work was The Bloody Chamber, a collection of short stories in which the stories all share a theme of being closely based on fairy tales. Her home in Clapham, where she lived for the last 16 years of her life, has now been commemorated with an English Heritage blue plaque. The school has named one their houses in honour of Carter.

[9] Continue along Abbotswood Road past 16A which is an entrance to Tooting Bec Common and the fabulously restored Woodfield pavilion run by a charity (thewoodfield.org) which often has art exhibitions and a pop-up café. A few houses further on is 8 Abbotswood Road, home to Siobhan Dowd for 15 years.

At the end turn right along Drewstead Road. On your left on the corner of Beckett Close is 60 Drewstead Road and a commemorative plaque to Richard Valentine Moore, awarded a George Cross by Winston Churchill and who was born on Valentine's day 1916.
At the top end of the road on the right is number 37 Drewstead Road where Suffragette Leonora Tyson lived. Leonora edited the Anti Suffrage Alphabet by Laurence Houseman and received book orders where she printed each edition by hand.

Continue to Streatham High Road and Streatham Hill Station is on the left.

Siobhan Dowd was a British writer and activist responsible for running writing programmes for marginalised young people. The last book she completed, "Bog Child", posthumously won the 2009 Carnegie Medal, voted by librarians as the year's best book for children or young adults published in the U.K. The book is set in the Troubles of Northern Ireland and follows an 18 year old boy who faces trauma whilst living in a hopeless situation.

Acknowledgements

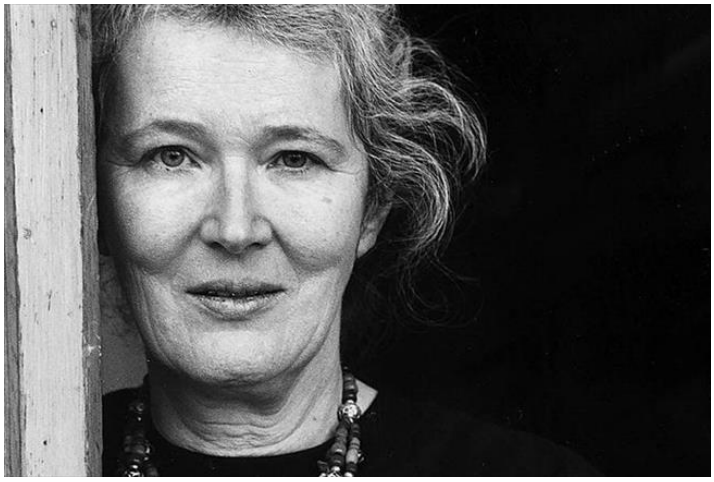
Developed by: *The Streatham Festival & The Streatham Society*
This walk was devised for the inaugural Streatham Literary Festival (2020) by Jane Wroe Wright of Heart Streatham Magazine and Mark Bery of The Streatham Society.

Streatham Festival website www.streathamfestival.com

For more local information, contact www.streathamsociety.org.uk/ or the local magazine, Heart Streatham www.heartstreatham.com

Namba Roy

Siobhan Dowd



Angela Carter

Dennis Wheatley

Raymond Thornton Chandler

VS Naipaul