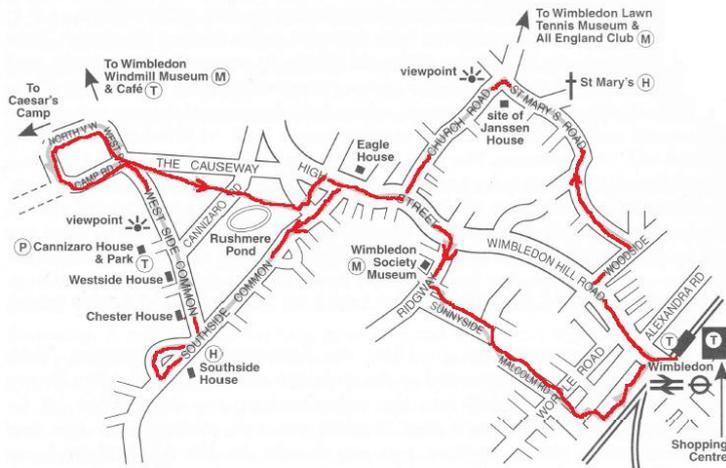


Fetcham U3A

Wimbledon Village



A circular 3 mile walk on high ground round the former south London village of Wimbledon, famous for its common and the international lawn tennis championships. The walk passes close to the spot where the Wimbledon tennis (originally croquet) club was founded in 1868 and explores the part of the common, ringed with fine Georgian mansions, that lies closest to the village.

Other features are Wimbledon High Street and local history museum, its historic parish church with 17th-century memorial to Lord Wimbledon and 19th-century grave of engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette, architect of London's sewer system, 17th-century Eagle House and Southside House, and fine views of London.

From the station forecourt turn right along the main road. Cross at the traffic lights and go straight on, passing the library on your right. At the end of the shops the main road starts to climb the hill towards the historic centre of Wimbledon, which has retained much of its village identity precisely because the railway had to be built half a mile away down here in the valley bottom. Just before the climb starts, turn right into Woodside. Walk along here and then take the first left into St Mary's Road. Follow this road as it winds its way uphill to the top of the plateau on which Wimbledon and its common sit, 150 feet (45m) above sea level.

Eventually you reach the junction with Arthur Road in front of the church. Here you are well inside the boundaries of the old village. To your right, though you can't see it, is the edge of the Wimbledon plateau overlooking the broad valley of the River Wandle. On this magnificent site, taking full advantage of the views, stood the first, second and fourth of the four manor houses built in Wimbledon between the 16th and 18th centuries. The first, completed in 1588, belonged to the Cecils, a powerful courtier family, who had come to the village about half a century before. (Sir Edward Cecil, third son of the builder of the house and a professional soldier, inherited the estate and was created Viscount Wimbledon in 1625.) The third was built by the Duchess of Marlborough, who bought the estate from a failed Huguenot financier in 1724. When her house burned down later in the century, her descendant, Lord Spencer, replaced it with Wimbledon's fourth and last manor house, completed in 1799.

Only half a century later, in 1846, the Spencers left Wimbledon. Their Wimbledon Park estate, landscaped in the mid-18th century by Capability Brown and extending down the hill into the valley bottom, was mostly sold off for development. The local council later acquired one part, including the lake, and opened it to the public. Another part was bought by the All

England Lawn Tennis Club and subsequently developed as the home of the Wimbledon tennis championships. John Beaumont built Stag Lodge in front of you and in 1872 laid out Arthur Road over the gardens of Lord Spencer house.

Beyond Stag Lodge, St Mary's Church has been an important religious centre for the best part of 1,000 years. Looking over the churchyard wall, the upper parts of Wimbledon's historic former rectory are visible. Built beside the church around 1500, this substantial structure, reflecting the standing of the rector of the living there

After Henry VIII forced the Archbishop of Canterbury to surrender his Wimbledon property in 1536, the Cecil family leased the rectory from the crown as a country house before building themselves their great manor house on the other side of the church. The present rectory is a more modern, and more modest, house close by.

Turn left at the junction with Arthur Road and continue along St Mary's Road. Turn left now into Church Road (turning right down the hill will bring you to the Wimbledon lawn tennis museum). Large houses line both sides of the road, those on the left being built on the site of Janssen's house. This was originally called Wimbledon House to distinguish it from the Spencers Wimbledon Park. Later it was renamed Belvedere House.

At the junction with the High Street, the nucleus of the village, turn right along the oldest section of the street and cross to the other side at the lights. Continue and then turn left when you get to Southside Common. This soon brings you to the beginning of Wimbledon great tract of common land where the villagers once grazed their animals and gathered turf and firewood.

Attracted by the healthy situation and proximity to the City wealthy Londoners started building houses here during the late 17th century after all the best plots in the village had been taken.. By the end of the 18th century the south, west and east sides of this little section of the Common -more a large village green really had been almost completely built up. The old houses on the east side have all gone now. On the west side (opposite you) most of the mansions fortunately remain. Here on the south side there are just a handful of survivors. Claremont House on the left,

The Common - The earliest history of Wimbledon Common and Putney Lower Common dates back to the paleolithic age and barrows such as the one known as Caesar's Camp (although not associated with the Roman period) have been discovered.

It is not generally appreciated that "common land" was never public property but was normally owned by the Lord of the Manor. In 1864, Earl Spencer, Lord of the Manor of Wimbledon, called a meeting of local residents in the Village Hall at which he outlined a Bill which he intended to present to Parliament for the enclosure of 700 acres of the common as a park.

In 1907 the aircraft pioneer A.V. Roe built his first full sized aircraft, Roe 1, at 47 West Hill, Wandsworth and flew it on Putney Heath in the early hours of the morning, without the Conservators' permission.