



Summerston182
GREAT ESCAPES
'FABULOUS FURZEDOWN'
HISTORY WALK
 4 miles, (50-60 minutes)
 Start at **ST NICHOLAS CHURCH**
MITCHAM ROAD, TOOTING, SW17

FABULOUS FURZEDOWN (4 miles, 50-60 minutes)



Thanks to these downloadable maps you can select your own local history walk taking in significant features of interest in the **Tooting/Earlsfield/Wandsworth/Streatham** area. Summerstown182 'Great Escapes' are just the job for your daily exercise allowance! Depending on how much you want to take in, you can do each one in less than an hour. Multiple flavours to choose from, every one a winner! **Perfect for mind, body and spirit.**

Is it in Streatham? Is it in Tooting? One thing for sure, everyone wants to lay claim to Fabulous Furzedown! Taking in three postcodes and more than its share of green space, this walk features some star turns including Dr Johnson's Mulberry Tree, All Saints Church 'The Cathedral of South London' and the world famous Tooting Bec Lido. When I lived there in the nineties you never heard much about it, so lets take a look and see what the fuss is all about!

1 START ST NICHOLAS CHURCH TOOTING - The original Tooting Parish Church contains tablets and memorials to the great and the good from earlier ages, many connected to a number of manor houses in the area. Sir John Hebdon was an envoy to the Russian Tsar. Philip Gidley-King was one of the first Governors of New South Wales. The Gassiot family were prominent wine-merchants. Notable Tooting names buried in the beautiful churchyard include; Jung, Mellhuish, Anderson, Parodi, Atlee. There's also a tablet remembering the 118 children buried here who died in 1849 after a cholera outbreak at Drouet's Pauper Children's Asylum.

2 Take a right into Church Lane past the Idara-e-Jaafariya Mosque, home since the early 70s to Tooting's Shia Muslim community. They are located in the old parish school building which dates from 1827. Like all the Mosques they welcome visitors and their community Iftar is a memorable occasion. Early records indicate frustrations at local children being taken out of the school here to work in the camomile fields.

3 Just past Gassiot Road on your right hand side is the entrance to St Benedict's estate, the site of an old hospital. Look out for the green plaque on a column beside the gate. Originally St Joseph's College, see if you can find the school's star symbol in the ironwork. It was later the Tooting Home for the Aged and Infirm and a WW1 hospital. As an old people's hospital facing closure, it was the scene of a bitter dispute in the early days of Thatcherism. For a while in 1979 workers took over and ran the hospital with trade union support. It closed in 1981. Take the next right turn into St Benedict's Close and follow the path to the right. The clock tower which once topped the main building and a portico have been preserved in the very pretty Limetree Walk. Go straight across and exit onto Rectory Lane.

4 Turn right and take the next road opposite into Welham Road. This area was heavily bombed in WW2. According to the LCC bomb maps almost every house on Crowborough, Idlecombe and Salterford Road was damaged with at least four V1s in the immediate area including two in one day. Pass St Paul's Church dating from a clue to a previous existence. Take a right into Ramsdale Road. To the left was the site of a large farm connected to Furzedown House and estate, and as Welford's Dairy Farm, a major milk supplier in the area. Turn right passing the Recreation Ground, hub of the annual Furzedown Festival, one of the great local annual community occasions. Next to this is Graveney School and through the trees on the right, Furzedown House. Built in 1794, it was owned by members of the Baring banking dynasty and the Haigh family with interests in the East India Company. It was later bought by the Seely family who made their fortune out of naval armaments. Sir Charles Seely who died in 1915 was MP for Nottingham and turned much of the estate into a golf course. Turn left into Furzedown Drive, which was probably the main road up to the house behind you. Now in the grounds of Graveney School, you can catch glimpses of it through the gates but the best view is from inside the school grounds. It was saved from demolition in 1911 by being repurposed as a teacher training college. Imagine the scene at the turn of the twentieth century; this house looking across fields towards the River Graveney, on the other side of what is now Southcroft Road From 1888 to 1906, before it relocated to Mitcham, this was the location of the Tooting Bec Golf Club where Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour played with local celebrities like Sir Harry Lauder. Seely Road follows the course of the river which is completely covered but visible at certain points. The golfing history lives on in the naming of Links Road.

5 Pass Moyser Road on your right, very heavily damaged by WW2 bombing. Here lived George Dear, a council groundsman who raised local attention to this area's connection with [Peter Barr 'The Daffodil King'](#). It is also home to the [Furzedown Project](#) and a number of local shops and cafes. When you get to the roundabout look out on your right for Furzedown Lodge, a lasting reminder of the big house behind you. A little bit further to the right along Clairview Road were a number of grand houses including Woodlands, home of Henry Doulton of the pottery family. A leading light in the campaign to protect the common, the grass area in Clairview Road would have been his carriage drive. Things are now going to take a very green turn. Cross here and continue on the straight path, bearing right as you approach Tooting Bec Athletics Track. For the best effect, divert from the tarmac path onto a rough unsurfaced trail and the running track emerges through the trees on your right hand side. Built in 1936 and one of the first floodlit facilities in the country, some of the world's finest athletes have performed there. Follow this onto Tooting Bec Road but turn right, entering North Drive, which runs alongside the main road, behind a bank of trees.

6 Prepare to enter an area of outstanding historic significance. Some of the grandest houses in the neighbourhood are located here. At No8, the stunning Dixcote House is a Charles Voysey design, built for Walter Essex, his wallpaper patron. No5 was for a while a children's home and someone who spent some time there was actor Lennie James, a former pupil at Ernest Bevin School. He and his brother lost their mother when he was ten years old and his moving account ['That First Without Her Christmas Day'](#) was on Radio 4 a few years ago. It now adjoins [Tooting Community Garden](#) run by Transition Town Tooting.

7 The grandest house of all didn't survive, but you can get a sense of Streatham Park, the 110 acre estate of the Thrale family with their Dr Johnson associations by turning right into Colson Way. [The Streatham Society](#) placed a blue plaque on the site of the house, which was demolished in 1863. A [mulberry tree](#) outside the convenience

store is believed to date from this period. There are at least two others in adjoining properties. At the end of North Drive, turn left and cross the road to the world famous Tooting Bec Lido, one of the largest open air swimming pools in Europe.

8 The Tooting Bathing Lake was built in just four months as a poor relief scheme in 1906. It was a place where the influx of new residents to the area, like those on the Tottenham Fields Estate could wash themselves. Behind the scheme was Rev John Hendry Anderson, also Mayor of Wandsworth. The thrill of entering Tooting Bec Lido never dims; the crystal blue waters, wrapped in a blanket of green trees, with a flash of brightly coloured changing-room doors. The Lido is the ultimate symbol of Tooting, a place that has brought great joy to generations of local people and from further afield.

9 Perhaps see if you can peep through the new Pavilion building to catch a glimpse of this precious jewel. Until about twenty years ago this was the main entrance. Follow the path with the Lido on your right. On a hot summer's day, picture the impatient towel-clutching hordes queuing up here to get in. There have been quite a few changes in recent years but they haven't altered its charm. Through the entrance you can see its Art Deco fountain or perhaps some of the brave souls from the South London Swimming Club who use this facility all year round.

10 Follow the path towards Bedford Hill enjoying the full effect of [Tooting Common](#). Bearing left, away from the road, continue towards the lake and pass to right of it, stopping to take a look at the 'Fossil Tree'. Continue along this path to emerge on to Chestnut Avenue which looked very different a few years ago with broad canopies of beautiful old trees overhead. A lively 'Stop the Chop' campaign did their best to preserve them and local feelings still run high on the issue. It is still pretty and the limes will one day grow tall, but something special has been lost. Turn right for the Tooting Common Cafe, then left, continuing to Dr Johnson Avenue, with a good view across the Common to the tennis courts on your left. The avenue was famously lined with oak trees, planted in honour of Queen Elizabeth I's visit to Tooting in 1600.

11 To your right a line of handsome houses overlooks the Common. No48 Elmbourne Road was the home of Mary Cawston Bousfield. She served as a nurse in France for the entirety of WW1 and died of influenza in 1919. She is on the war memorial in [Holy Trinity Church](#) and commemorated with a bench in St Sever Cemetery, Rouen where she is buried. Curiously its not far from L'Abbaye du Bec-Hellouin in Normandy, which was granted lands here by William the Conqueror and from where Tooting Bec gets its name. Both these French locations are worth visiting.

12 Take a diagonal path bearing left across the Common towards a copse of trees. Keep to the left of the trees and cross Tooting Bec Road to the health centre. Behind this and stretching all the way down Church Lane and up to Mantilla Road is the enormous 'Heritage Park' housing development. This is on the 22 acre site of the old Tooting Bec Asylum, built in 1903, which at one time cared for almost 2,000 patients. Still operational when I came to live here in the 1990s and apparently one reason why there were so many incidents of 'a person on the line' at Tooting Bec station. In the 60s and 70s 'The Misery Line Murderer' was active in this area. Kieran Kelly is believed to have pushed up to 20 commuters to their deaths on platforms at Northern Line stations in south west London - not an easy time to travel on the tube.

13 Bear right and go down Franciscan Road. Just beyond a grassy patch on the left and crudely dissected by a fence, a stone plaque in the perimeter wall dating from 1897 marks the asylum boundary. Opposite this, another estate is on the site of Newlands House, also a mental hospital and in WW2 a POW camp for Italian prisoners. Opposite the Newlands entrance, in the early 50s, Ruth Ellis lived for a few years in one of the terraced houses on your left. She was convicted of killing her lover David Blakeley in 1955 and was the last woman to be hanged in this country. A lot has been written about her and her fate would have been very different in more enlightened times. She's buried in the corner of a quiet churchyard near Amersham.

14 High on the the hill, All Saints Church, is renowned for its acoustics and stunning interior, though the vicar's choice of Italian Renaissance fittings caused a row with the architect. It was referred to as 'The Cathedral of South London' by John Betjeman. Indeed it was considered for the role of principal cathedral in the Diocese of Southwark but was rejected because not enough space had been allowed for the parking of carriages. Artists who have recorded here include Pavarotti, Kiri Te Kanawa and Paul McCartney who chose it for his 'Tribute to Linda'. Three Guess brothers, killed in WW1 are among the names on the war memorial in front of the church.

15 Passing down Franciscan Road you are in the heart of the Tottenham Fields Estate. Built between 1901 and 1911 this was a pioneering garden estate, providing pleasant affordable homes for working people who flooded into the new suburb. One of the first residents was local centenarian Len Jewell who recalled seeing a WW1 zeppelin over his home on Derinton Road. The street names also have a connection with Bec Abbey, being places in England where monastic cells were set up after the Norman conquest. The name Tottenham translates from the Saxon as 'look-out place on the hill'. Close to the bottom of the hill take a left into Eswyn Road. On the right hand corner here and also half way down the road, you will see evidence of WW2 bombing. Take a right turn into Vant Road.

16 This is a curious road with some of the oldest housing in the area. Older maps show a medieval moat, a bit like the ones in the Fishponds area and undoubtedly associated with St Nicholas Church. These water features have occasionally caused problems and you might detect a bit of a wobble in some of the houses on Vant Road. At the end of the road on Mitcham Lane, look out for a couple of long-standing shops on the other side of the street; Mixed Blessings Bakery was the site of the Tooting Music Centre, a 70s recording studio. One person hanging out there was Gary Glitter who had his boots fixed at Konstantino's next door. Turn left out of Vant Road and you are back on Mitcham Lane, heading for St Nick's with The Longroom pub across the road. This was formerly The Mitre, a nod to the Bishop of Chertsey, an early landowner in this area.

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