




'FIRST LADY SADIE' HISTORY WALK
 2.5 miles, (40-50 minutes)
 Start at **TOOTING BROADWAY UNDERGROUND STATION**

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Originally devised to help everybody through the lockdown, these great downloadable walks take in significant features of historical interest for you to enjoy in the **Tooting/Earlsfield/Wandsworth/Wimbledon** area. There are now multiple flavours of Summerstown182 'Great Escapes' to choose from, every one a winner! **Perfect for mind, body and spirit.**



In 2014, a mention on a Radio 4 programme ['The Lost Women of British Jazz'](#) led to local awareness that a pioneering musician had been born in a house on Fountain Road. Raised in extraordinary poverty into a world of asylums, workhouses and domestic service, [Louisa Marshall](#) travelled the world, played with some of the greatest musicians of the age and is believed to be the first British female musician to feature on a jazz recording. 'Sadie' spent the last 30 years of her life in the USA and is buried in Washington DC. For that and the fact she is the first woman to be recognised with a blue plaque in Tooting, we call her 'First Lady Sadie'. One day a film will surely be made about her remarkable life.

1 START TOOTING BROADWAY TUBE STATION - The first decade of the 20th century and reign of King Edward VII was an extraordinary time when a wave of African-American performers and musicians descended on London. Rag-time artists such as [Pete Hampton](#) performed at Buckingham Palace and the King himself had banjo lessons from the [Bohee brothers](#). Hampton and his wife Laura Bowman lived for a while in a house in Wimbledon Park they called '[Darktown Villa](#)'. They were a great influence on the young Louisa, now 'Sadie Johnson' treading the boards as a dancer at the [Empire Theatre](#) in Leicester Square and learning the saxophone with her future husband Adolph Crawford.

2 Round the corner from the station, on the site of the Sainsbury's was Graveney School, briefly attended by Louisa in 1897 when she was 11 or 12 years old.

3 Cross the road as if heading for the Wetherspoons pub and veer left along Tooting High Street taking the second right into [Gilbey Road](#). Not far down on the left hand side, at No19 consider the year 1901 and census records which show 15 year old Louisa working as a 'general domestic servant' in the household of a tailor called James Anderson and his six children. At the end of this road turn left then sharp right at the hospital to go down a path behind Tooting Leisure Centre.

4 You now enter Tooting Gardens, once the site of a rubbish disposal facility known as the 'Slop Shoot'. In more recent times it provided an air raid shelter. Follow the path into Tooting Grove. This once dissected two fever hospitals on the site of St George's - 'The Fountain' and 'The Grove'. This was notorious for its slum housing. Famous residents include [Corporal 'Tiny Ted' Foster VC](#) and Alice Mullen who wrote a book about the struggles of working class life in Tooting at the turn of the century, '[Alice from Tooting](#)'.

5 Turn left into Fountain Road and at [No143](#) is the house where Louisa AKA Sadie was born in 1885. The 1891 census shows her here as the youngest of seven children living with her recently widowed mother Ellen. A blue plaque was placed on this house in 2018 at which a pupil nominated as the '[Sadie Crawford Scholar](#)' from Streatham and Clapham High School performed. Sadie's great nephew [Stephen Willis](#) also played a recital that day and [the plaque was unveiled](#) by five of her nieces. In 2019 Stephen raised funds for a permanent memorial to be placed on Sadie's unmarked grave in [Mount Olivet Cemetery](#), Washington DC.

6 Opposite this house is a block of flats called Anderson House, named after [Reverend John Hendry Anderson](#), Mayor of Wandsworth, whose work relief schemes resulted in such initiatives as the building of Tooting Bec Lido. Pass beneath the arch into Fountain Road Recreation Ground, once the location of a 150 feet tall chimney, part of a rubbish incinerator site known as the '[Tooting Dust Destructor](#)'. Veer right following the path out of here and turn left onto Alston Road.

7 Take the first left into Bertal Road and turn right at the bottom. On the other side of the road is Lambeth Cemetery where a number of music hall stars including Dan Leno, Stanley Lupino and Charlie Chaplin Senior are buried. Sadie would have recalled Leno's funeral in 1904 which brought the area to a standstill. The nearest theatre to this area where we know she definitely performed was at [Wimbledon Theatre](#) on [29th March 1915](#), where she and Adolph were billed as '[Crawford and Johnson, Creole instrumentalists and dancers](#)'. Other notable venues where they performed were [The Canterbury](#) at Waterloo and The Surrey Music Hall.

8 Alfred Hurley House on the right was named in honour of the local councillor and newspaper owner Alfred Hurley, whose book 'Days that are Gone' is a vivid account of life in Tooting before and between the Wars. Life was very harsh for most people in this area. Fortunately Ellen found love with Louis Slade and in November 1892 her eighth child Charlotte was born at Groton Road, near Earlsfield Station.

9 Turn right at the mini-roundabout into Wimbledon Road. After the First World War, Sadie embarked on a musical touring career which took her all over the world including extended periods in Paris and South America. [Her family](#) continued to live in the Earlsfield area, most notably her sister Rhoda Newbon and her 13 children at Turtle Road in Earlsfield. [St Mary's Church in Summerstown](#) which was built in 1904 on the corner of Keble Street became an important part of their lives. Old photos of weddings and other gatherings occasionally feature Sadie on her visits home. During the Second World War, Sadie told of her family's suffering in London in an interview in '[The Afro American](#)'.

10 Turn right into Hazelhurst Road, pass the tower blocks and veer to the left where some bollards cross the road. Opposite Smallwood School, a [green plaque](#) on Sutton Courtenay house marks the site of a Second World War V2 rocket attack on 19 November 1944. 35 people including 14 children died and one hundred homes were destroyed. One of those killed was an escaped POW. The plaque was unveiled in 2015 by two brothers who were pulled from the rubble that morning.

11 Turn left into Smallwood Road, then right into Pevensey Road. This is the heart of the 'Fairlight' area, a collection of streets built around 1900 but soon known for its poverty and deprivation. Earmarked for slum clearance by Wandsworth Council in the late 60s, local residents such as '[Red Rose](#)' [Cook](#) formed themselves into groups to fight compulsory purchase orders. The council withdrew and most of the terraced housing stock has been preserved and flourishes. Look for the splendid view of the helipad on top of St George's Hospital at the end of the road.

12 Take the third left turn into Fairlight Road. On the left hand side is the Fairlight Christian Centre and a small block of social housing. This marks the site of [Fairlight Hall](#), an extraordinary institution, originally a 'Ragged School' which between 1905 and 1980 provided care for thousands of people of all ages in this area, most notably in pre-NHS years between the wars at a time of unemployment and financial strain. It was around this time that Sadie started touring with Adolph, all over Europe, and further afield to Russia, the Balkan States and Scandinavia.

13 Louisa/Sadie was born into an era of colonisation and expansion of Empire, particularly in Africa. Cross Garratt Lane and at the florists go down Khama Road. [Chief Khama III](#) of Bechuanaland (now Botswana) converted to christianity and was a great supporter of this country at the time of the Boer War. The young Louisa would have known all about 'Khama the Good' and his visits to Britain. Take the first right into Graveney Road.

14 About two thirds of the way down Graveney Road on the right hand side, Sadie and family lived for a while at No65. Her mother Ellen had remarried Louis Slade in 1905 and had an eighth child called Charlotte.

15 Follow the road as it forks to the left and turn right into Selkirk Road. There are some very old shops here including Roberts, a bespoke tailors which opened in 1886. Harrington's famous [pie and mash shop](#) has been run by the same family since 1908. Its very likely that Sadie at that point about to embark on her touring would have been a customer. In 2014 this was the location of Tooting Arts Club's performance of '[Sweeney Todd](#)'. It was attended by the writer Stephen Sondheim and the consequences were a run in the West End and New York's Broadway with the Selkirk Road pie shop being faithfully re-created on each occasion.

16 Turn right into Tooting High Street and its a short walk to the station. On your right you will pass The Castle, a famous old Tooting boozer with showbiz/music history. In the 50s Danny Kaye and Peter Sellers performed in revues here and later as a 'rockers' pub, the likes of Staus Quo, Mott the Hoople, Rod Stewart and The Faces. In 2018, Stephen Willis and I talked about Sadie here to John Kelly for an article in [The Washington Post](#).

FOR INFORMATION AND MORE WALKS: summerstown182.wordpress.com  @summerstown182

If you enjoy your walk, please consider making a donation to CriticalNHS, sustaining local business by keeping the St George's frontline staff fed www.criticalnhs.org