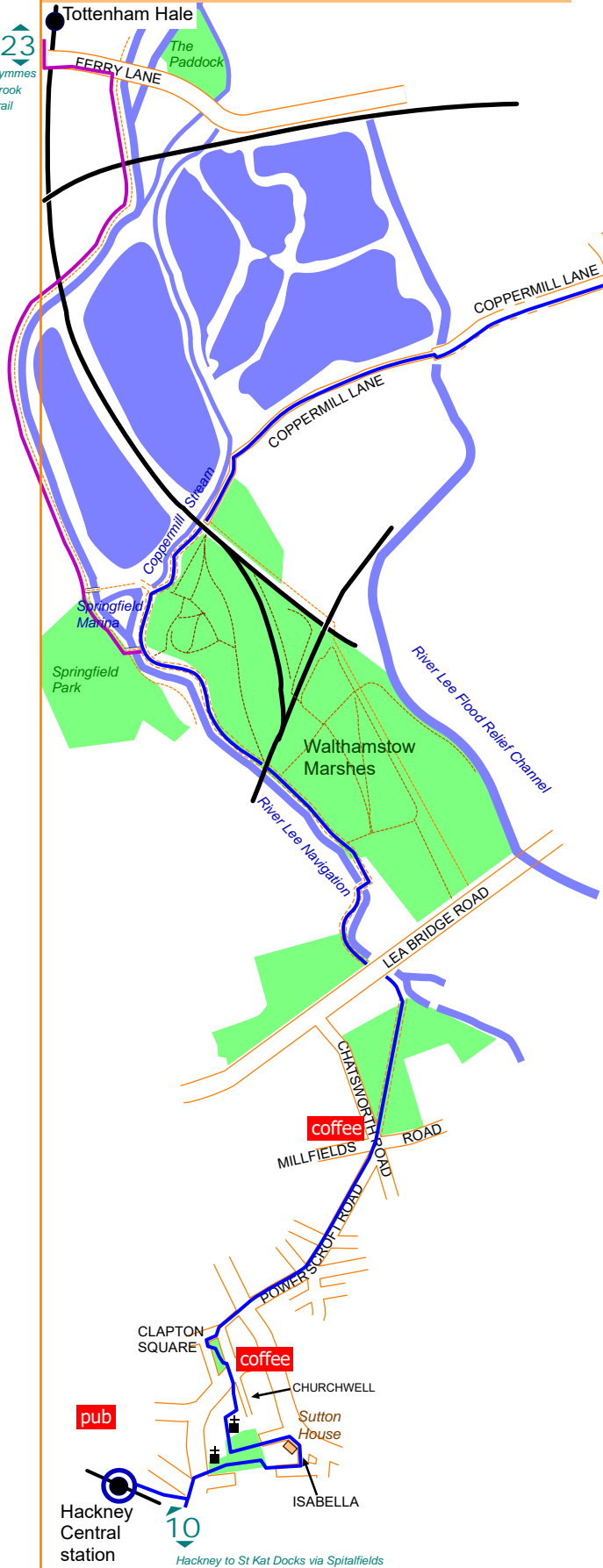


# Walthamstow to Hackney

23  
Pymmes  
Brook  
Trail



This is the first half of a gradual downhill walk from Walthamstow to the River Thames

- main walk 9.3 km
- option to William Morris Gallery +1.7 km
- Springfield Marina to Tottenham Hale 4.3 km
- railway

10 connection with another walk

1 kilometre



*Pembury Tavern, Dreyfus Bakery?, Cooper & Wolf, also untried pubs and cafes on Orford Road*

Inspiration for walk from Patrick Hamilton, *Walking Across London*, Capital Travel Books

## walk notes

*Inspiration for this 9.3 km walk along pavement and gravel towpath comes from Patrick Hamilton, Walking Across London, (Capital Travel Books). It starts with an exploration of old Walthamstow before continuing down to the River Lea navigation and up through Clapton to Hackney*

### **Old Walthamstow**

Walthamstow started on a hill before it migrated downhill to the railway. It was a culmination of five small villages, and affairs were discussed at Vestry House, acting as the first town hall. Squire's almshouses were built in 1795, while Orford House and The Chestnuts date from the early 19th century. Most of the village was built up in the 20 years following the enclosure of Church Common in 1850, including a new Nag's Head on Orford Road. In 1870 it had grown to the size of a small suburb and a town hall was built in Orford Road, along with a National School, traditional shops and cafes, from which affairs of the village were run. The coming of the railway station drew development further south and preserved the village for posterity.

### **Vestry House Museum**

Walthamstow workhouse was built in 1730, and the church's vestry meetings were also held here. Vestry House later served as a police station, then as the headquarters of the Walthamstow Literary and Scientific Institute and from 1892 as a private home, before becoming a museum of local history in 1931. It also houses the borough's archives and its local studies library.

**The Ancient House** is a timber framed hall, believed to have been originally constructed in 1435. Although the building was continually used for both domestic and commercial purposes until 2000, chronic decay necessitated extensive restoration and the complete re-construction of the oak frame. The walk then passes the old parish church of St Mary the Virgin, parts of which date back to the 13th century, and Vinegar Alley, allegedly so named because locals used vinegar to sanitise the soil after a plague pit was dug, by the Almshouses founded by Monoux in 1527 together with the school which later relocated to Chapel End. A notice board there gives some history.

### **George Monoux**

George Monoux was born in Walthamstow, became a member of the Drapers Company

and went on to be Lord Mayor of London in 1514 and a local benefactor in Walthamstow. In 1527 Monoux purchased land for the almshouses and a school that retain his name and left property worth £50 a year to pay the salaries of a schoolmaster and parish clerk. This chantry endowment lasted until 1548 when it was suppressed during the Reformation.

He died in February 1544 and was buried at Walthamstow.

### **Walthamstow Market**

The walk continues down the length of the market, the longest daily outdoor market in Europe at approximately one kilometre and started in 1885.

### **Lea Valley Reservoirs**

The walk continues past the southern end of the Lee Valley Reservoir chain. Walthamstow Reservoirs are a complex of ten water bodies, most of which were constructed between about 1853 and 1904 by the East London Waterworks Company. They have a combined water-area of around 316 acres with a total capacity of 1,200,000,000 gallons. All the Walthamstow reservoirs form part of a designated site of special scientific interest (SSSI), which supports a wide variety of fish, birds and waterfowl, including migratory species. In particular they provide a habitat for a colony of herons, which have bred at the reservoirs since 1928.

### **Walthamstow Marshes**

Walthamstow Marshes are one of the last expanses of semi-natural marshland left in London. Extending to 88 acres, they are unique in the Lower Lea Valley as all the other marshes have, at one time or another, been drained, used for gravel extraction, used as dumps or redeveloped completely. In all, 350 plant species have been recorded in the Marshes including Creeping Marshwort, one of Britain's rarest plants. The wetter parts have a beautiful mixed-fen vegetation with large expanses of Sedge, Reed Sweet Grass and Reed Grass that grows to 5 and 6 feet tall. Reed Mace ('bulrush') is found in the Coppermill stream and in drainage channels beside the Sandy Path; Yellow Grass in other channels and streams. Tufted Hair Grass, an indicator of ancient grassland, can be found alongside Marsh Horsetails and Comfrey. The survey of 1981 recorded ten new plants. Seventeen species of butterfly breed on the

Marshes, including an important colony of Essex Skippers. There are dragonflies, damselflies and crickets. Moths found on Walthamstow Marsh include Lime Hawk, Swallow Prominent and Marbled Beauty. Sedge Warblers, Reed Warblers, Reed Buntings and Goldfinches; Greenfinches, Stonechats, Skylarks, Herons, Kestrel and Snipe sweep over the Marshes. There are voles, shrews, harvest mice with frogs in spring and frogspawn in the ditches and reedbeds.

#### **Alliott Verdon Roe**

AV Roe began to build a full-size aeroplane with the use of stables at his brother's house in West Hill, Putney, which he tested at Brooklands near Weybridge, recording his first successful flight in 1908. After encountering problems with the management there he moved his flight experiments to Walthamstow Marshes, where he rented space under a railway arch at the western end of the viaduct. Despite many setbacks, Roe persisted with his experiments and there is now a blue plaque commemorating his first successful flight in July 1909 at the site. His aircraft, Avroplane, a triplane, is preserved in London's Science Museum.

#### **Lee Valley Navigation**

Work on improving the river's navigability is recorded as early as the fourteenth century and in 1425 there was an Act of Parliament to provide for further improvements. The River Lea Commissioners, who used to run it, date back to this period. As was so often the case, where rivers were improved for navigation, there were arguments between barge owners and mill owners who preferred the available water to be used for mills rather than locks. The navigation was much used for carrying grain for beer and bread making and those who might lose their livelihoods from the lower prices that became possible as a result of cheaper transport also objected to improvements. Disputes over the right of navigation reached the Star Chamber, a superior court of justice, in 1594, which ruled in favour of the boats.

The canal era was marked by the passage of the River Lea Act 1766 which authorised much more extensive improvement works and the construction of locks, new sections, and the Limehouse Cut, a connecting canal at the southern end. The locks were, of course, single gate locks which relied on a build-up of water and its sudden release to

enable boats to pass. The type of lock we know today is a pound lock, with gates at each end, which is far less wasteful of water. Pound locks were introduced to the river Lea in 1771.

#### **Clapton Square**

The walk continues across the unremarkable South Millfields Park and up Powerscroft Road into Clapton.

Development of the lands north of Hackney village led in 1816 to the laying out of Clapton Square. It is protected as a London Square and as being in a Conservation Area.

The first railway murder occurred in 1864. It was one of the most sensational crimes of the century. On Saturday, 9 July, the 9.50pm train from Fenchurch Street on the North London Railway arrived at Hackney at 10.11pm. At 10.20pm, the driver of a train travelling in the opposite direction saw something between Hackney Wick and Bow Stations. He stopped the train and found an unconscious, severely injured man. The victim was Thomas Briggs, chief clerk of a bank, who had been travelling home to 5 Clapton Square. He was nearly seventy years old and died of his wounds the following night.

#### **St John at Hackney**

The Church of St John-at-Hackney was built in 1792, in an open field, north east of Hackney's medieval parish church, of which only St Augustine's Tower remains.

By 1789 the old church's capacity, even with the addition of numerous galleries, could only seat 1,000. By 1788 a committee found that the population of the parish had increased so much that the church needed to seat 3,000.

The trustees were empowered to acquire Church Field to the north-east of the existing churchyard. The existing tenants, a butcher and corn chandler, were given three months to move. James Spiller, influenced by and a friend of Sir John Soane, was chosen as architect; Hackney church was his largest project and remains his magnum opus. It was consecrated in 1797 and a year later the body of the old church was demolished, but the tower remains.

#### **Sutton House**

Sutton House was built of brick in 1535 by Ralph Sadleir a courtier of Henry VIII. At the age of fourteen Ralph had been placed in the household of Thomas Cromwell and became Principal Secretary of State to Henry VIII. It is the oldest surviving domestic building in Hackney and owned by the National Trust.