

# Three commons walk, (or four)

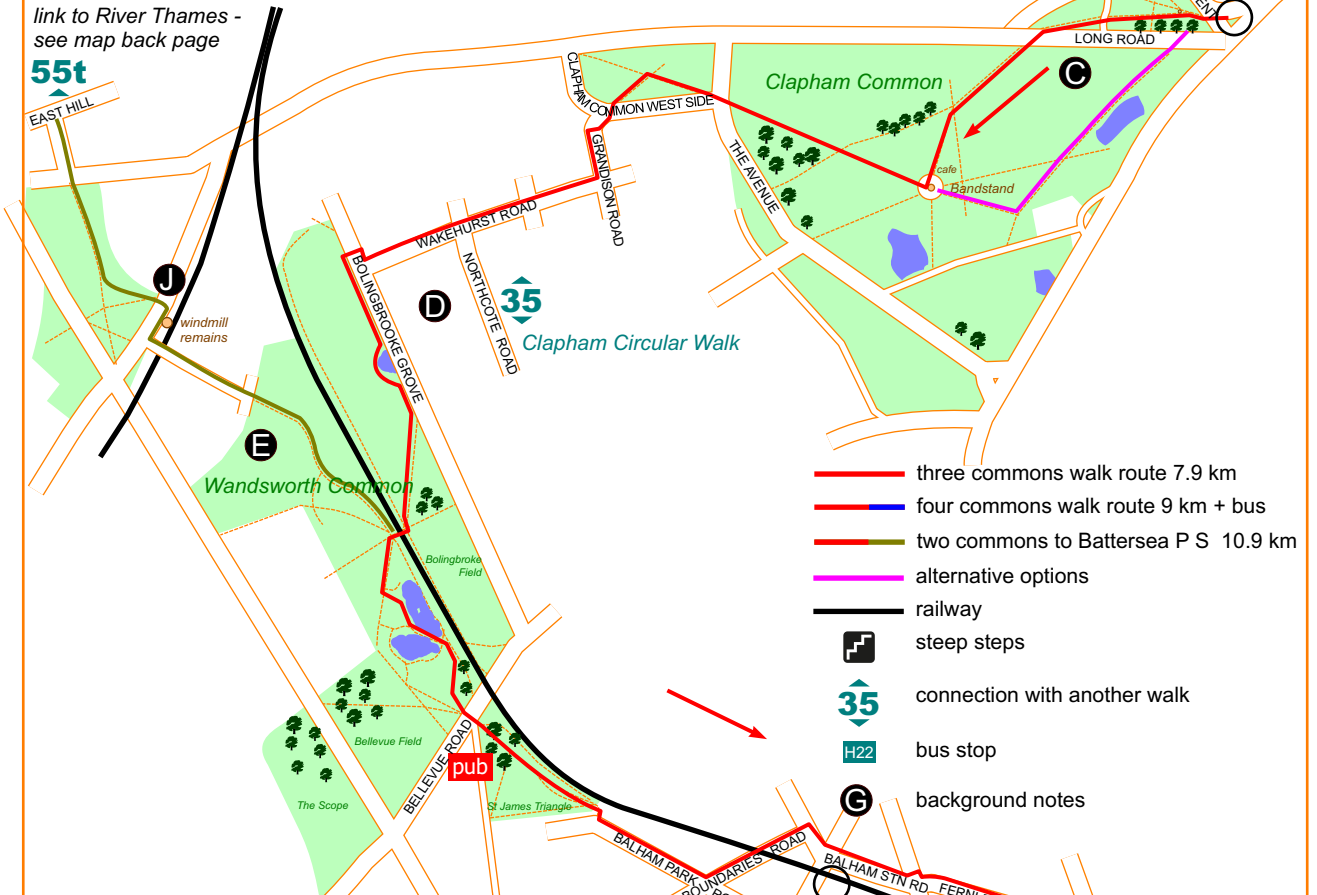
link to River Thames - see map back page

55t

1 kilometre



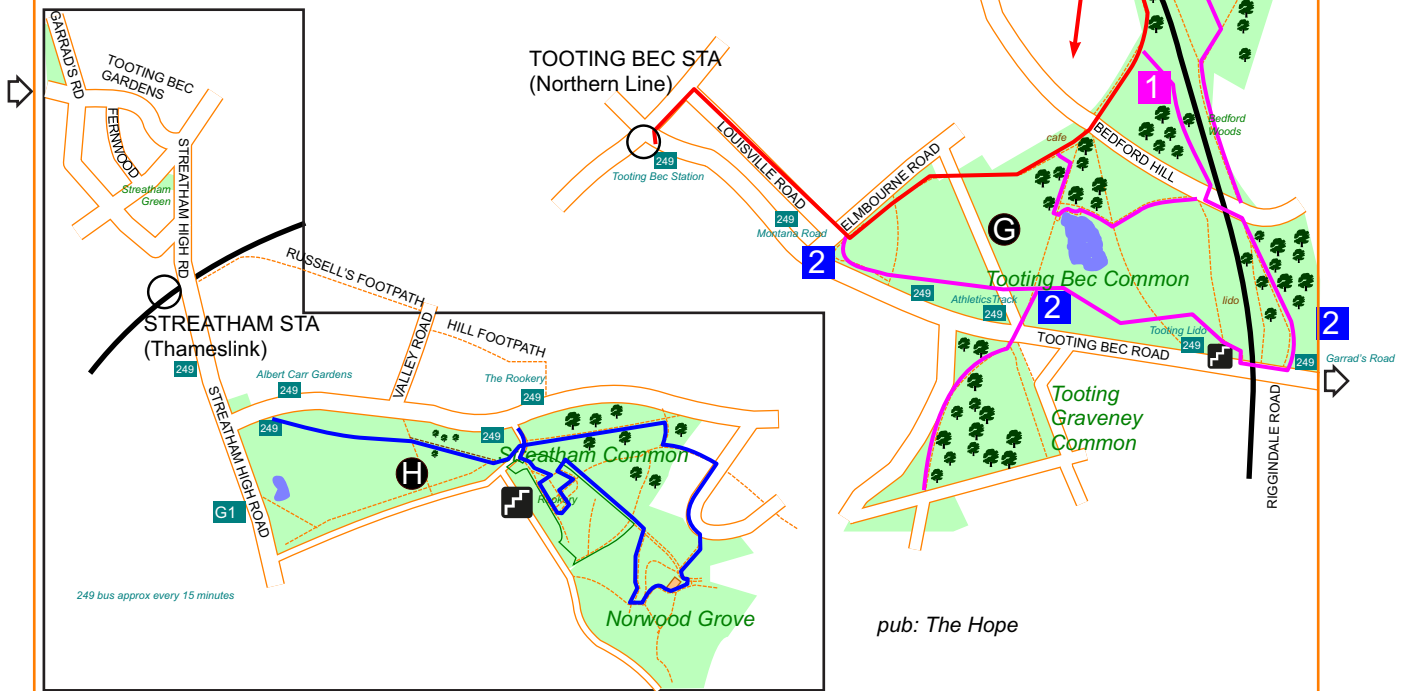
CLAPHAM COMMON STA (Northern Line)



- three commons walk route 7.9 km
- four commons walk route 9 km + bus
- two commons to Battersea P S 10.9 km
- alternative options
- railway
- step steps
- connection with another walk
- bus stop
- background notes

**1** This route through Bedford woods is not so clear. Exit to main road is near railway line.

**2** To add Streatham Common: take 249 bus (towards Anerley, approx every 15 minutes) from the end of Tooting Common and get off at The Rookery. Return to Tooting Bec station. Shortest walk between commons is 1.1 km from Garrad's Road via Fernwood and the Green. Via Russell's footpath to The Rookery is 1.8km. Capital Ring takes a 2.1 km route.



*This walk consists of three commons, linked by mainly quiet, middle class Victorian/Edwardian residential terraced housing in various styles. You can of course vary the route through the commons as you see fit.*

### **A Clapham**

Medieval Clapham was a tiny place with a population of less than 100 and remained a small farming settlement for centuries. It began to grow in the late 17th century and by the end of that century was quite a large village. In the late 18th century it became a fashionable place for the rich to live as it was close to the amenities of London but was in a rural setting away from the dirt and noise of the city. By 1801 Clapham had become a suburb with a population of 3,864.

**B** By then the centre of the village had shifted, and the emphasis was now on the area around the Common, where rich Londoners had their new mansions. The parishioners decided to build a new Church on the Common. An Act of Parliament was obtained, to allow the land to be bought from the manorial family and to set up a Trust to manage the construction. They chose as their architect Kenton Couse, who was employed by the Office of Works and whose best known work is the front of 10 Downing Street. He provided a very simple design - a rectangular brick building with three doors at the west end, leading to the ground floor and galleries, and a tower with a large clock from Thwaites of Clerkenwell, and four bells. Holy Trinity Clapham opened for worship in 1776. In 1903 the east end was considerably enlarged by architect Arthur Beresford Pite. Holy Trinity is associated with the group of friends known to history as "the Clapham Sect". They lived around Clapham Common and worshipped there. Devout Christians, they fought for religious and humanitarian causes, notably the abolition of the slave trade. Their campaign was led in Parliament by William Wilberforce. But they took up many other causes; the heritage they have left us includes the Church Mission Society and the Bible Society.

### **C Clapham Common**

By the late 17th century, the Common was being used for recreation, including horse racing and cricket. In the next century its gravel

was exploited for road making. The many gravel pits became ponds, and on one of these the American statesman and scientist Benjamin Franklin experimented with the properties of oil on the surface of water. Big houses were built all round the Common; but it remained a rough place, frequented at night by robbers.

In the 1760s a wealthy local resident, Christopher Baldwin, led an initiative to improve the Common by levelling and filling ditches and planting trees.

In 1877 the Metropolitan Board of Works purchased the Common and turned it into a formal recreation ground for games like cricket, football and golf.

In 1890 The bandstand (Grade II listing) was installed as centrepiece of new radial path network at the request of local residents. Reportedly the largest surviving bandstand in the UK.

Clapham has around 2000 individual specimen trees and two small areas of woodland. Many of the large trees were planted before 1895, mainly in avenues of London Plane and Lime.

### **D Between the Commons**

Between the commons lies the former valley of the Falcon Brook. These 280 acres had been home to large gentlemen's estates, until advancing London and better transport links made it ripe for development with mainly ornate Victorian terraces. After an initial development of Chatham Road by the National Freehold Land Society, the Conservative Land Society bought from its last private owner a large part of the estate of Bolingbroke Grove House, stretching from Battersea Rise to present day Wakehurst Road and from Bolingbroke Grove to Webbs Lane, and development spread south in earnest from Battersea Rise in tranches. The brook was covered over to form Northcote Road, the spine of the development, initially residential, later replaced by shops to form a local hamlet. (Earning the sobriquet "Nappy Valley".) In 1875 Northcote Road was extended south and Wakehurst and Belleville Roads added, connecting Bolingbroke Grove to Webbs Lane. In the mid 1880s development spread eastwards across Webbs Lane to the Chatto estate bringing into being Buland, Chatto ,

Dulk and Grandison Roads, as well as extensions to Leathwaite and Wakehurst Roads.

### **E Wandsworth Common**

The Manor of Battersea, dating back to the 11th century and given to the Abbey of Westminster by the Crown, returned to the Crown during the Dissolution. It was subsequently sold to the St John Family. The wastes of the Manor stretched from the Wandle to Falcon Brook, the subsoil there of terrace gravels, originating from a former course of the Thames, and unsuitable for farming. A remnant of this is what we now call Wandsworth Common.

Henry St John became first Viscount Bolingbroke after purchasing the title in 1712. In the 18th Century the Manor was purchased by Earl Spencer, Lord of the Manor from 1763. Both families are commemorated by street names.

The fourth earl Frederick (1845-1857) initiated many major land sales and enclosures. Residents concerned at the loss of land held public meetings, founded a fund-raising defence committee and eventually the Wandsworth Common Act 1871 established conservators charged with improving the common, with powers to buy back land and convert it into common land.

In 1902 the earl John Pointz gave up all Spencer rights to the Common and the LCC opened what they called Wandsworth Common in 1924.

### **F Balham**

Until around 200 years ago Balham was a hamlet of farms and a few country houses on the old Roman road of Stane Street, and was part of the parish of Streatham.

As travel to London became easier, the town began to grow around Balham Hill in the early 19th century. When the Pimlico and Crystal Palace Railway opened in 1856, with a station at Balham, the town centre gravitated southward to its present location near the station.

### **G Tooting Bec Common**

Tooting Common is historically two commons; The larger, Tooting Bec Common, to the north and east and the smaller Tooting Graveney Common, to the south. They were once part of

much larger medieval manors. Tooting Bec in Streatham, and Tooting Graveney Manor. The name Tooting Graveney originates from the De Gravenell family who were awarded the land in the wake of the Norman conquest of 1066. The manor of Tooting Bec was under the ownership of Tooting Bec Priory, associated with the Benedictine abbey of Bec in Normandy, in modern day France. The priory was dissolved in 1315, long before the Reformation, and the land was granted to Eton College in 1440. Although the Statutes of Merton in 1235 led to the establishment of Common rights at Tooting, the Lords of the Manor retained ownership and continued to profit from the land until it passed into municipal hands.

In 1875 an Act of Parliament was passed confirming the ownership and management of Tooting Graveney Common by the Metropolitan Board of Works. By 1873, the Metropolitan Board of Works had also acquired fully the manorial rights to Tooting Bec Common, at that point comprising 144 acres, from Robert Hudson. In exchange for reasonable compensation, both commons were now protected from the threat of enclosure and were gradually developed as one public space for recreation and sport. Management was passed over to London County Council in 1889 and eventually to Wandsworth Council in 1970.

### **H Streatham Common**

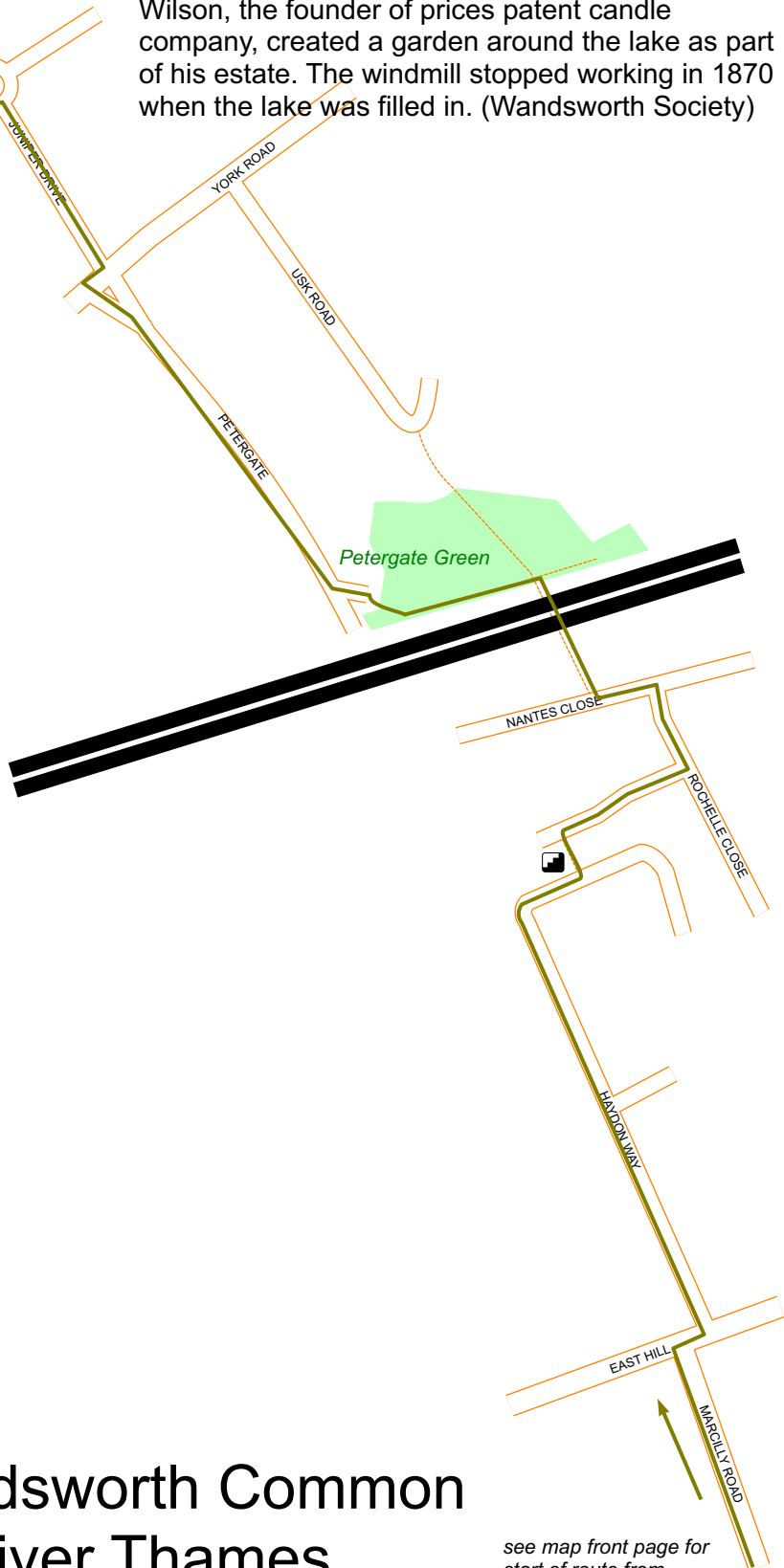
In 1362, the Black Prince granted the Manor of South Streatham, (including the wastes, now the Common), to the Prior and Convent of Christ Church, Canterbury. On dissolution it passed to the Dean and Chapter and then to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. In 1884, the Metropolitan Board of Works bought 66 acres of common land for £5 in order to preserve it for all time as a place of public open space. The Rookery gardens mark the site of Streatham Spa or mineral wells. In the 18th century, crowds visited Streatham to take the waters, with their supposed healing powers. The Rookery takes its name from that of a large house that stood close to the wells. After the house and surrounding grounds were acquired by the London County Council, the house was demolished, the grounds landscaped and gardens created. The area was opened to the public in 1913.

RIVER THAMES

55t

### Wandsworth Mill

This is all that remains of a smock mill constructed in the 1830s by the London and south western railway company to pump water from the cutting into a nearby lake known as the black sea, William Wilson, the founder of prices patent candle company, created a garden around the lake as part of his estate. The windmill stopped working in 1870 when the lake was filled in. (Wandsworth Society)



Link from Wandsworth Common footbridge to River Thames

see map front page for start of route from common, total distance from footbridge 2.4km