

STOKE NEWINGTON HISTORY WALK

Clissold Park to Woodberry Wetlands
and the West Reservoir

Information

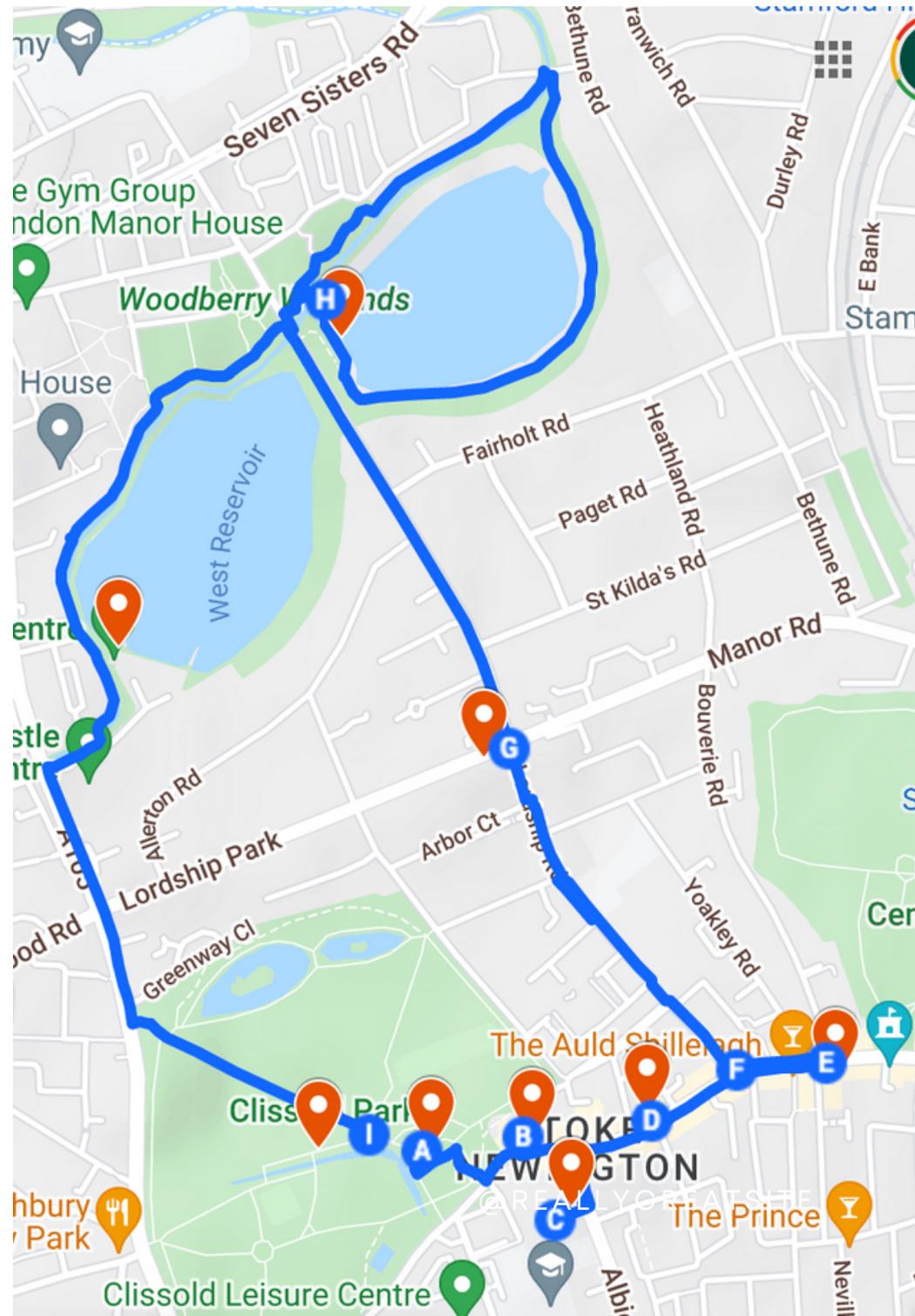
Distance 5km (3 miles)

Time: Around 60 minutes



Accessibility: This walk is flat and wheelchair accessible – there is a slight hill on the Lordship Road stretch the route and at the end at Green Lanes.

Toilets (there are toilets at Clissold Park and Woodberry Wetlands)



Start point: Clissold House, Clissold Park



Formerly known as Paradise House, this mansion was built by Jonathan Hoare, who came from a family of Quakers, in 1793 and the land around it was used for agriculture.

Just five years later Jonathan Hoare ran into financial problems and took out a mortgage, with the condition that he pay back double if the debt wasn't paid in time. He failed to pay and the bank foreclosed.

The house was bought by Thomas Gudgeon in 1799 and sold on to William Crawshay in 1811 (he was from a family of wealthy ironmasters from South Wales). His daughter Eliza fell in love with Augustus Clissold a curate at St Mary's Old Church where she worshipped. William disapproved and forbade the romance. It's rumoured he built the walls of the garden higher to stop them seeing each other.

When William died in 1834, Eliza inherited the estate married Augustus who gave the house its name.

The 53-acre estate passed back to the Crawshaw family when Augustus died and they sold it on to developers for £95,000 (£11 million in today's money), Local optometrist Joseph Beck and his friend John Runtz launched a desperate campaign to stop the development.

2. Turn left out of the park onto Stoke Newington Church St.



You'll pass The Old Church (on your left just after the park). It's London's only surviving Elizabethan Church (built 1563) and is now an arts centre. In the graveyard here lies James Stephen (William Wilberforce's brother-in-law) who was a chief advisor on the anti-slavery bill. His grave is in the south-eastern part of the churchyard.

When the congregation grew too big at the Old Church, Revd Thomas Jackson instructed that a new church be built opposite. St Mary's Church was designed by George Gilbert Scott and consecrated in June 1858. But, due to lack of funds, it went without a steeple for 32 years and had a funny flat top.



Locals made up this rhyme:

Stoke Newington is a funny place with lots of funny people, Thomas Jackson built a church but could not build a steeple.

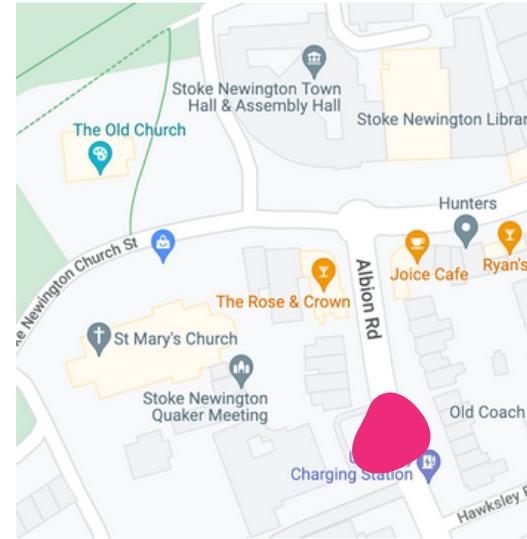
3. Stoke Newington Town Hall

Fast forward 50 years and, with World War Two raging, councillors were worried the then white Town Hall (which had only been built in 1937) would be used as a navigation landmark for German aircraft. Camouflage paint was applied to the building to make it harder to spot from the sky and less likely to be bombed. Rumour has it a cow was put on the roof to further the illusion! English Heritage has highlighted this building as being of architectural and historical significance.

This Grade II Listed building was designed by John Reginald Truelove – the art deco interior is incredibly glamorous. It's home to Western Europe's second largest mirror ball!



4. Barton House (Albion Road)



Now a doctor's surgery, this is the site where Joseph Beck lived. He's the reason Clissold Park was saved from development and a brown plaque is erected in his honour here.

Beck, an optical and microscope manufacturer, dreamed children would be able to: "take their first steps on the grass of Clissold Park and one day play under the sun." He ran a four-year campaign urging locals and authorities to buy the land and it sparked furious rows. Some said the park was a 'swamp' and not worth saving.

The campaign led to the creation of The Clissold Park Preservation Committee – they brought a Private Bill to Parliament to enable adjoining parishes of Islington, Hackney and South Hornsey to help buy the land, together with a massive £72,500 donation from the Charity Commissioners and Metropolitan Board of Works.

The park was saved! Its official opening took place on July 24th, 1889 – tragically Mr Beck died of cancer of the tongue two years later.

5. Cross over Albion Road at the zebra crossing and follow Stoke Newington Church St east



The late 1800s was a real turning point for Church Street. Until then the street was famed for its mansion-like residences with large gardens and paddocks with livestock. It was also home to several boarding schools. During the 1830s and 40s shop fronts were fitted to the 18th century houses. Later in the 19th century the larger houses were replaced with terraces and shops, with small scale industries taking over the back rooms and gardens.

This was the stomping ground for poet Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), who was a pupil at the Manor House School which used to stand at 172 Stoke Newington Church St.

A brown plaque is erected at the site in his honour.

6. Walk to the corner of Church St and Defoe Road.

Daniel Defoe (1661-1731), author of Robinson Crusoe, also wrote some pretty punchy pamphlets criticising the way certain people practised their religions.

He lived in a house at what is now 95 Stoke Newington Church St (look out for the blue plaque) and it wasn't unusual for him to escape his adversaries via the rooftops of neighbouring properties.

When the authorities finally caught up with him and put him in the pillory for alleged libel, he was so popular among the people that instead of throwing rotten fruit at him, they threw flowers (1703).

Throughout his 20s Defoe saw himself as a kind of venture capitalist – investing in various get-rich schemes – he traded in cows, tobacco, bricks, hosiery, honey, land, wine and even bought 70 civet cats (they were valued for their anal glands which have an oily substance that can be turned into perfume – ew!). He quickly depleted his wife's sizeable dowry and bankruptcy came more than once.

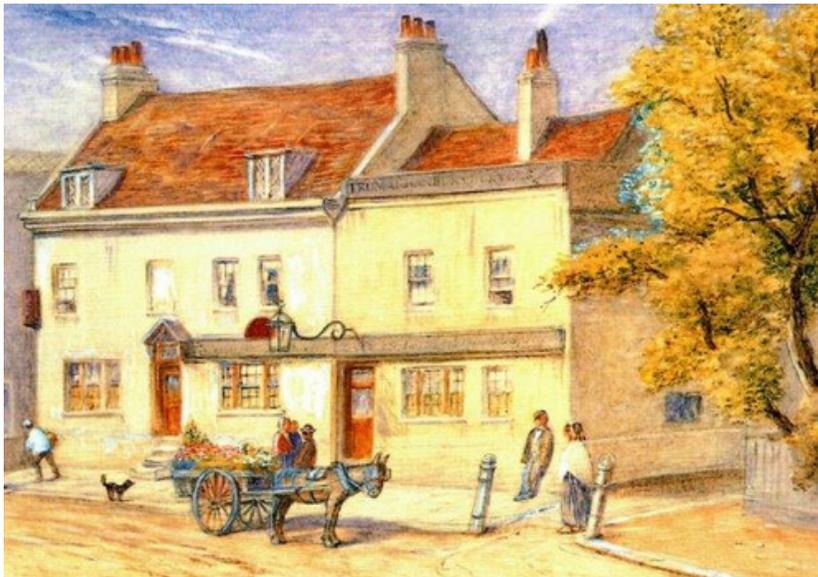


Picture courtesy of StokeyHistory.com

7. Cross the road and turn back on yourself. Head back to the Red Lion Pub at the junction with Lordship Road.



The first record of a Red Lion Pub being here dates back to 1697 and it was comprised of two separate houses. It was rebuilt in 1924.



8. Turn right down Lordship Road

There were no houses on this road before around 1835 when new development policies made the building of rural retreats possible.



The only one of those early Victorian villas still standing is St Mary's Lodge. It stands at 73 Lordship Road (at the junction with Lordship Park). There used to be a tollgate across Lordship Road at this junction, charging for passage towards Seven Sisters Road.

The house was designed by prominent architect John Young for his family (which included nine children) and two servants. He also designed what is now called the Royal Marsden Hospital.

Other notable occupants of St Mary's Lodge include Hugh Crabb whose son Lionel was a scuba diver in WWII and won the George Cross for outstanding bravery. In 1957 during the Cold War his headless and handless body washed up on the coast near Portsmouth after he was sent on a mission to secretly inspect the hull of a new Russian warship.

Though the building is in a sorry state now, there are plans to preserve the façade and transform it into to a Jewish boys' school for the Viznitz Orthodox community.

9. Walk on down Lordship Road to Woodberry Wetlands.

The entrance to the Wetlands is on your right-hand side, a few minutes after Fairholt Rd. There's a copper structure signalling the start of the walk and a wooden walkway into the nature reserve.

The Coal House Café is a lovely place to stop for a bite to eat or a hot drink.

Follow the pathway around the reservoir.

About the Wetlands

Hailed by Time Out as one of London's "secretly best brilliant bits," the Wetlands were opened by Sir David Attenborough in April 2016 – signifying a satisfying end to a community campaign to save the site from development.

The East and West Reservoirs were built in 1833 as storage for the New River, which brought fresh drinking water to the city. In the 1850s grand mansions were built with gardens overlooking the East Reservoir but two World Wars led to many of the houses being sold off or becoming derelict. The Greater London Council compulsory purchased the homes (1930-1955) and built a large housing estate to rehouse slum dwellers from East London.

Meanwhile the water in the reservoir was treated with chlorine and sodium phosphate (1950-1980), leaving it devoid of wildlife. In 1992 the reservoirs were listed for sale by the newly-privatised Thames Water – hoping they would be filled in and built over. Resident fought a strong campaign and eventually won! The reservoirs were cleaned up, walkways were constructed and a team of volunteers, led by London Wildlife Trust now looks after the reed bed, hedgerows and meadows.

In 2001 regeneration of the Woodberry Down Estate began – with old social housing being demolished and replaced with modern apartments.



Your walk around the wetlands will follow the reservoir's perimeter - taking you back to the copper structure at the start.



10. Cross over Lordship Road and head for the West Reservoir.



This site is now used for sailing and water sports and is one of London's most beautiful open water swimming spaces.

Both this reservoir and the East Reservoir were lined with bricks from the old London Bridge.

11. Walk along the northern edge of the reservoir and follow the path along the New River towards Green Lanes.

The New River was built as a public-private partnership between King James I and jeweller and entrepreneur Hugh Myddleton in the 1600s as a way of providing fresh drinking water. It used to flow along a big chunk of Church St.

You can't miss the distinctive castle-like building on the edge of the reservoir with its distinctive turrets and chimneys. It used to be the pumping station for the reservoirs. Locals were against the idea of an industrial-looking pumping station so it was designed by engineer William Chadwell Mylne and architect Robert William Billings as a flamboyant castle. William's dad Robert Mylne designed London's Blackfriars Bridge. Now the building is a climbing centre.



12. Now turn left onto Green Lanes and re-enter Clissold Park.

We hope you enjoyed your walk!