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## Greenwich

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Distance: 5½ km=3½ miles

easy walking

Region: London

Date written: 8-apr-2018

Author: Thwelder

Last update: 6-may-2020

Refreshments: everywhere

Map: Explorer 161 (London South) or London A-Z *hopefully not needed*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*London villages, commonland, gardens, observatory, river, noble buildings, pubs, museum, art gallery, market, sailing ship*

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### In Brief

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This is an awesome linear walk through history, giving you the greatest views of east London from one of the largest areas of green common land in Greater London. Central to the walk is the Royal Observatory, a 350-year-old living institution of scientific discovery. The walk takes you down to the river for a scenic stretch, rarely seen by tourists. The end of the tour incorporates a group of famous buildings of unrivalled splendour and interest.

To give you the most dramatic approach to Greenwich Park, without the usual strenuous climb up the hill, the walk begins in neighbouring Blackheath which holds much of interest in its own right.

Along the way, there is an enviable collection of places for refreshment, including several of the best riverside pubs.



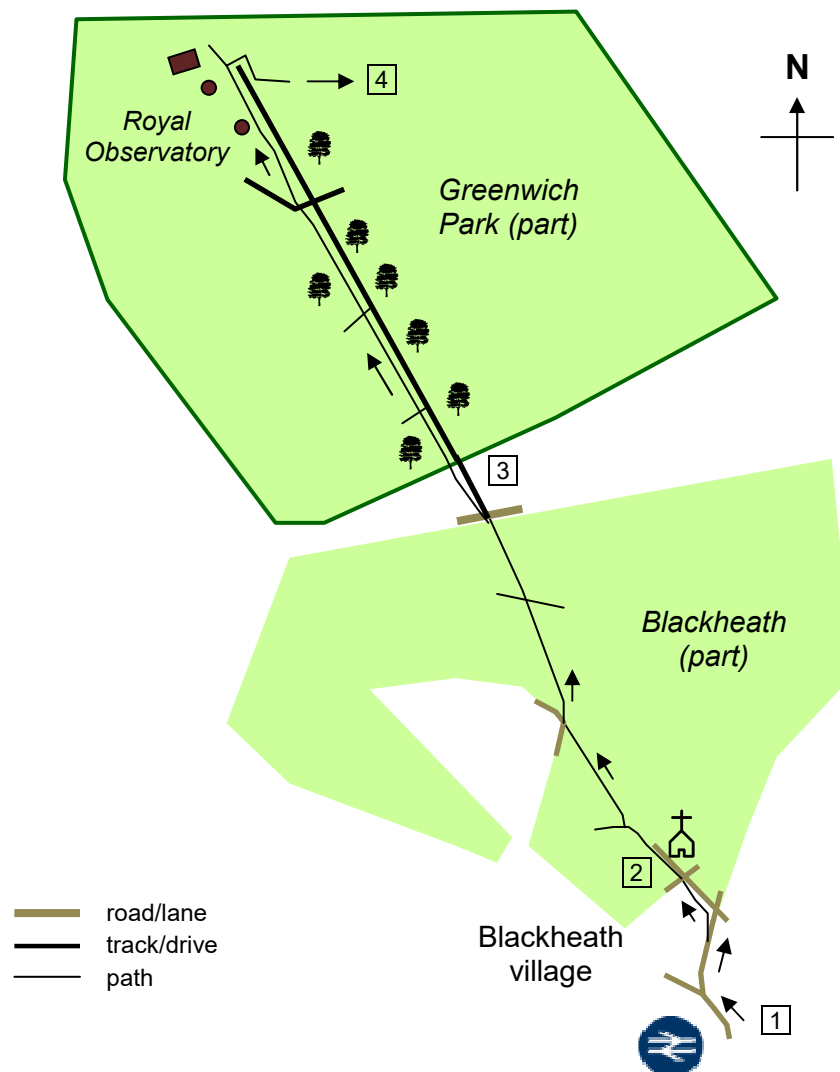
Any kinds of footwear and attire will be fine.



The walk begins at **Blackheath**, S.E. London. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



## The Walk



- 1** From Blackheath Railway Station, turn **left** on the main shopping road. In 50m the left fork, Tranquil Vale, has some fantastically popular eateries in case you need to get fuelled at the start. But your route is **right** at the fork, on Montpelier Vale. Fork **left** at the end of the terrace up the wide pavement, passing estate agents (yes, Blackheath is full of those) and cafés, heading for the church. Cross a road straight onto the green. (If you arrived by bus, this is where you will probably get out.)




*Blackheath is in the posh commuter belt of S.E.London, combining with Greenwich, safely removed from Lewisham to the west, and trendy enough to attract artists and actors such as Glenda Jackson. The “black” part of the name just means the heath was once bleak and unfriendly. From Blackheath the rabble could view the seat of royal power in Greenwich and it was here that Wat Tyler’s rebellious army of pitchfork-wielding men (100,000 strong) gathered in 1381 before marching on London. In 1450 Jack Cade’s forces took up arms from here against King Henry VI’s misrule. The Cornish Rebellion of 1497 also set up camp here but were defeated in the so-called Battle of Blackheath.*


- 2** Walk with the church (*All Saints, dating from 1857*) close by on your right to join a path straight across the green. *The space on your left was once called the “quoits ground” (from the popular game) and, beyond that, a drying ground was used by laundresses.* Just after the church, take the **right** fork. In nearly 200m, you meet houses on your left at the corner of a built-up square


called Blackheath Vale where in the past you could have seen several windmills, a brewery and the vicarage. Fork **right** here on a wide path across the green. The path goes over a “compass” from where you continue your northerly direction. Use traffic lights to Cross Shooters Hill (*notorious in history for highwaymen*) onto Duke Humphrey Road and thence through the gates (familiar as the start of the London Marathon) straight ahead into Greenwich Park.

*Greenwich Park is the oldest of the royal parks and one of the largest, covering 200 acres=81 ha. Henry VIII made it into a hunting park with the introduction of deer (which still flourish in an enclosure on the Blackheath side). The heath was landscaped, possibly by the same André Le Nôtre who planned many of the Paris open spaces. Many fine houses were built along the edges, most now forgotten in history. Rose gardens and arboretums are among the delights if you would like to explore.*

-  **3** Straight ahead is a wide avenue of horse chestnuts known as Blackheath Avenue that bisects the park. Keep ahead along the avenue using the wide boulevard on the left. *The fine redbrick visible on your left is the Ranger's House, a survivor from a whole series of mansions that once graced the western edge of the park.* At a crossroads by the Pavilion Café, keep straight ahead to reach the Royal Observatory on your left, a must-see of science history (up to the present day). You can enter some exterior areas for free, including the terrace and the café, but the various buildings are open from 10 till 5pm daily for a modest entrance fee. The famous Meridian Line is inside the compound but you can of course cross the meridian outside (see the “Danehill” walk in Sussex on this website).

*The Royal Observatory was commissioned in 1675 by the merry monarch, King Charles II, with John Flamsteed as the first Astronomer Royal. The site was conceived by Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke. The original brick building is still called “Flamsteed House” and holds a remarkable collection of telescopes and other instruments including Harrison's most important clock, used for solving the “longitude problem” of navigation. The site includes a Planetarium and the re-constructed and soon-to-be-working Altazimuth (a celestial measuring instrument). The Observatory established the longitude zero for navigation and hence “Greenwich Mean Time” and the “Greenwich Meridian”. The current (active) Royal Observatory (which gives out the famous time signal) is now at Herstmonceux in Sussex.*

-  Adjoining the observatory, at the end of the avenue, is a terrace with great views of the Thames and much of London. You can see the O2 Arena (*visited on another walk on this website*), the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf, the Orbit Tower in the Olympic Park and, just below you, the buildings of Greenwich which you are about to see more closely. The statue here is of James Wolfe, hero of Quebec (*see the “Westerham” walk on this website*).

- 4** **See map overleaf.** From the statue, turn back the way you came and turn **left** at a fingerpost in the direction *Queen Elizabeth Oak* (that is, a **right** turn coming from Blackheath, leading away from the Observatory). In 40m, ignore a crossing path and stay on the level. In another 100m or so, you come to the *Queen Elizabeth Oak* (*described in the interesting info tablet*). Go straight over the crossing path and in 100m, turn **left** on a very wide crossing path. In only 30m zigzag **right-left** to take a much narrower path which rises up the hillside. Soon you have a terrific view across to the buildings of the Observatory. At the top, your path reaches a viewpoint with seats where you have the best view in the park, with the whole of East London spread out below. Cross straight over a crossing path and take a
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tarmac path straight ahead which starts level and then descends in a long flight of steps. At the bottom, take a short cut straight ahead across the grass to join the path beside the boundary wall (or if the grass is very wet, turn **right** to the park boundary and **sharp left** on a tree-lined path). In the corner, with a playground and loos on your left, exit through metal gates to the elegant terrace of Park Vista.

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- 5** Turn **right** on Park Vista and **left** on the main road, going over the railway near Maze Hill station. Take the next **right**, Woodland Crescent, and stay on the road as it wheels **left**, using the crossing lights to go straight over the main road to Lassell Street opposite. In 50m, keep **right** on Old Woolwich Road, passing a white converted chapel on your left. This road curves right in a crescent. Take the **fourth** road **left**, Hadrian Street, a near-perfect terrace of Edwardian houses, finally turning **left** at the end on Pelton Road. *The Nag's Head* shows a coalpit, a reminder of the Kent mines that once shipped coal from here. Follow Pelton Road to the end where you finally come to the riverside at Belfast Quay. You have views here across to the Isle of Dogs and on your right you can see the cable car (see the "Silvertown" walk on this website). (On your right is the start of a quite superb walker's + cycle path, leading to North Greenwich and the O2 Arena.) Turn **left**, immediately reaching the *Cutty Sark* pub. *The Cutty Sark* is a Youngs pub / restaurant in a Georgian building dating from 1795 with an enviable riverside terrace.

- 6 Continue along the Thames Path, passing the iconic Greenwich Power Station, originally built to power the tramways, still operating but using gas and oil. *Notice on your left a children's "story" about "gloop" on panels set in the wall.* This is immediately followed by the Trinity Hospital, the oldest building in Greenwich. Its little clock strikes the hours.

*The Trinity Hospital is a set of almshouses, enclosing a garden and lilypond, originally built in 1613 by Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton to provide shelter for twenty "Poor Men". Strict conditions were laid down: to be chosen, a man must be unmarried and "decayed, ... poor by casual means and not through his own dissolute life". No "common beggar, drunkard, whore-hunter, haunter of taverns, ... nor unclean person infected with any foul disease" was admitted.*

Continue along a narrow street between cottages, passing the *Yacht* pub and the large historic *Trafalgar Tavern*, ending at the imposing side edifice of the Old Royal Naval College. Turn **right** past a statue of Horatio Nelson (probably still thinking of Emma Hamilton) and **left** alongside the fence of the College. Half-way along, go **left** up steps into the grounds of the College. Admission to the grounds, including the Chapel, is free. Straight ahead over the road, the white Palladian mansion is the Queen's House, for which see later.

*Greenwich (Anglosaxon "green shore village") may have been a home to kings since the 1200s. The Old Royal Naval College stands on the site of Henry VIII's Greenwich Palace where his son the future Henry VIII was born. Here too, the future Tudor queens Mary I and Elizabeth I were born. Greenwich was Henry's favourite home. His marriage to Catherine of Aragon was solemnised in St. Alphege's church. In 1536, he saw his second wife Anne Boleyn drop a handkerchief, which he took as evidence of an adulterous relationship, leading to her arrest.*

*King Charles II had the palace demolished to make way for the present-day building which was the Greenwich Hospital, a home for retired sailors. In 1873, the building became the Royal Naval College, a training establishment, although it closed as such in 1998.*

- 7 There is no exit to the road ahead, so your best course (after exploring this historic building) is **right** at the central crossing, passing the Painted Hall (still under scaffolding in 2018 and worth seeing). *There is now an admission charge of £12 for the Painted Hall giving unlimited entry for one year: loss of government funding!* As you come away from the main building, your route is **left** to the main road and the museum. But first, every visitor will continue a little further and turn **right** through an archway into the *Old Brewery*, where there are restaurants, loos and a riverside lawn with more cafés. After possible refreshment and having turned **left** to the road (that is, **right** if coming back from the *Old Brewery*), cross the main road at the lights and turn **left** and **right** into the grounds of the National Maritime Museum, an absolute must-see for any visitor to Greenwich. Entry is free.



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*This splendid neoclassical Victorian building became the National Maritime Museum in 1937, following a public appeal with the author Rudyard Kipling suggesting the name. New glass wings and a large café/restaurant were added in recent times. The museum contains a vast collection of naval objects, artworks and seafaring charts, but especially some wonderful models of naval vessels through history, showing the people that sailed them and the places they visited.*

Adjoining the National Maritime Museum is another priceless treasure, the Queen's House a masterpiece gallery of art, also free.





*The Queens House was built to say “sorry” (so it's said). Anne of Denmark was with her husband, King James I, on a hunt when she accidentally shot his favourite dog. The King let out a tirade of broad Scots profanities in front of the Queen. By way of apology, he engaged the great architect Inigo Jones to build this matchless Palladian villa for her (perhaps as a refuge from his rude court?). The building was given a complete makeover in recent years and is now one of the great London art galleries with paintings by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Turner and Hogarth, and many great Dutch and Italian artists.*

- 8 After your visit to the Museum and Queen's House, return the way you came along the main road as far as the traffic lights. Turn **right**, cross the road by the lights and continue right for a few paces to turn **left** in a narrow passage Turnpin Lane. It leads to Greenwich Market. *Greenwich Market is a great enclosed vintage market, erected in 1831, open 8-6pm unless you are unlucky enough to arrive on a Monday or Wednesday. The goods are mainly arts and crafts but, this being Greenwich, entirely tasteful: there is some food here too.* Turn **right** through the whole length of the market, out to the road. Cross the road very carefully when you have a chance and turn **left** (or **right** if you are not hurrying home). The Greenwich (Cutty Sark) DLR station is straight ahead, but your visit still has a twist in the end: on your **right** is the Cutty Sark, the famous tea clipper.



*The Cutty Sark was built in 1869 on the Clyde as a fast tea clipper, capable of 17½ knots (over 20 mph), reaching Australia in 61 days. The name comes from Robert Burns' poem “Tam o' Shanter” and means “short chemise”, such as worn by the female figure you now see on the prow of the ship. The Cutty Sark's useful days were cut short by the arrival of steamships and she became a training vessel before being dry-docked here in Greenwich.*

The brick-and-glass dome near the prow of the ship is the Greenwich Foot Tunnel, useful in case you would like to extend your walk to the Isle of Dogs and Canary Wharf. If you prefer to return by British Rail, turn **left** opposite the DLR station, going past St. Alphege's church, to find the station in ½ km.

## Getting there

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### Train:

Charing Cross, Waterloo East and London Bridge to **Blackheath station**:

Mon-Sat: every 15 mins, only 2 stops after London Bridge.

Sun: every 30 mins (25 and 55 mins past the hour).

return from Greenwich (Cutty Sark) DLR station (or Greenwich station).

### DLR and bus one-way:

DLR to Greenwich (Cutty Sark), followed by bus 386 to **Blackheath church**.

return from Greenwich (Cutty Sark) DLR station

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