



Twickenham and Richmond Riverside

Distance: 7 km=4½ miles

easy walking

Region: Greater London

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Refreshments: everywhere

Map: Explorer 161 (London South) *but the map in this guide should suffice*

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River towpath, small riverside towns, ferry crossing, country houses, gardens

In Brief

The bank of the River Thames just downstream from Twickenham reveals a dazzling string of surprises, including secret gardens, historic houses and open spaces. This linear walk finishes at Richmond after visiting another great house and walking along the famous riverside. An easy connection by train or bus connects both ends of the walk, or you can travel to Twickenham by train and return from Richmond. Frequent daily services are available, including on Sundays.

You may want to check opening times on websites. *Ham House* gardens are open every day from 10, the house from 12. *Marble Hill* house is open at weekends only, by guided tour, late March to end-October. *Orleans House* is being transformed in 2017 and will re-open as a marvellous art gallery.

This walk takes you across the Thames *by ferry*. The Twickenham Ferry runs every day on demand, except from *November to February* when it *only runs at weekends*.



This is an easy walk so any kind of sensible walking shoes and attire will be fine. Your dog will enjoy the river but will not be allowed in the houses of course.



The walk begins at **Twickenham**, south-west London, or in **Richmond** (with a train or bus ride at the start), or in any car park along the way, such as the free (as 2017) **Ham House** car park, postcode **TW10 7RS**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

If you are beginning the walk in **Twickenham Railway Station**, turn **left** on the main road, soon passing the *William Webb Ellis* pub (named after the Rugby schoolboy who was supposed to have picked up the football and invented the game which so dominates the life of Twickenham). When you reach the main crossroads, cross over York Street, keep right and turn sharp **left** on narrow Church Street.

Twickenham dates back at least to the year 704 when the name on old manuscripts looks like "Tuiccanham", possibly the "homestead" of the "Tuicca" family – no one is sure. It was granted by Swaefred, King of the East Saxons, to Bishop Waldhere, further back in history than most people learn nowadays. It was another 1000 years before Twickenham became a fashionable resort for the wealthiest people of London, eager to find a salubrious place to live far from smells and disease. A whole series of rich homes were built along the riverside, some of which have survived and appear on this walk. In the other direction are the villa of the poet Alexander Pope and Horace Walpole's house Strawberry Hill which is a must-visit. Nowadays Twickenham is known world-wide for its stadium known locally as "Billy Williams' Cabbage Patch" where thirty grown men regularly charge around after a wobbly ball.



- 1 Follow picturesque Church Street, away from the Twickenham shopping centre, passing the *Eel Pie* pub on your left. Church Street is well-known for its small shops, restaurants and pubs. It is named after **St Mary's Church** which you reach at the end.

The original St Mary's church collapsed in 1713, leaving only the tower. The "new" neo-classical structure was designed by local architect John James. The poet Alexander Pope is buried under a plain stone slab in the church, bearing just the letter "P". The lady keyholder says the church is open on weekdays till 11, also Sundays 2.30-4.30pm.



Turn **right** just before the church and follow the lane down to the river. Opposite you is Eel Pie Island with its huge boat yards. *This island is privately owned and was famous in the 50's and 60's for its jazz and blues sessions.* Also to be found in the block of small streets on your right are the *Barmy Arms* pub with its vast *al fresco* seating area and the tiny *Mary Wallace Theatre*, run by the Richmond Shakespeare Society. Turn **left** along the lane beside the river, logically called *Riverside*. On your left is the church's memorial garden and on the right a balustraded sculpture garden and play area overlooking the river. *(As a quick diversion, just ahead along the lane on the left is Dial House, dated 1722, with its sun clock, owned once by the Twinings (tea) family.)* Turn immediately **right** through a gate into the little sculpture garden which is known as *Champions Wharf*. The seats here are surrounded by quotes by Twickenham's favourite son, Alexander Pope. Cross the sculpture garden to the opposite corner and turn **left** through a gate onto a walkway immediately next to the river. In only 30m turn **left** into the riverside gardens which belong to York House. At once, on your left your eyes meet a remarkable sight: the rockery and water cascade known as the "*Naked Ladies*" or the "*Oceanides*".

The Naked Ladies were part of a larger tableau created in Carrara, Italy from the local marble. They came into the possession of Whitaker Wright who had made countless millions in mining, was convicted of fraud but escaped jail by swallowing a cyanide capsule (see the walk "Witley, Hambledon, Chiddingfold" in the Surrey section of this website). They then went to Beale Park (see the "Basildon Park" walk in the Berkshire section). By now, no one could remember how the statues were supposed to be arranged and indeed who they represented. (The name "Oceanides" from Greek mythology seems to have stuck.) The owner of York House (see below) had them arranged as you see them now but the layout evoked some criticism. The statues suffered further indignities before being restored by a benefactor and by the present owners, the local Council.

- 2 Continue through ahead into the next section of the garden which has a little round pond. After exploring the rest of the garden and the riverside terrace, turn sharp **left** out of this garden, over a stone bridge, into the large sunken lawn of **York House**.

York House was built by the York family who lived on this land for several centuries. The exterior was redeveloped in the 1800s but the core of the house dates back to 1630. The house was occupied by various owners, including a descendant of the French king (see Orleans House below) and the Indian industrialist Sir Ratan Tata. The most interesting of the owners was the sculptress, novelist, traveller and blue stocking Anne Seymour Damer (1749-1828). Widowed when her husband killed himself, she was captured by a corsair whilst crossing the Channel, was introduced to Nelson and had a meeting with Napoleon. She sculpted heads and busts of the greatest names of her time, including King George III and great Whig politicians and actors. She was rumoured to like female attachments and often dressed in men's clothes, although she is also portrayed in a flowing dress "sculpting the posterior of Apollo".

Turn **right** across the lawn or along the raised path to find an archway leading into the next part of the garden. On your right here is possibly the most attractive part, a classical willow pond with a lovers' seat. Bearing round to the left towards the tennis courts and the big tenements, you will find the exit gate. Turn **right** along the pleasant Georgian terrace, Sion Road, coming back close to the river side. Turn **left** to reach the *White Swan*, an iconic pub, freehouse, fantastically popular of a summer evening where crowds vie for a seat in the river garden. *The Thames in Twickenham is tidal, being downstream from Teddington Lock, so this area may flood during a spring tide, as you may see from the flood gates in front of some of the houses.* Continue along the lane. After a zigzag and a barrier, on your left are the grounds of **Orleans House**.



Orleans House was named after Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orleans (1773-1850) who lived here after fleeing the French Revolution. (He later returned as King of France until the revolution of 1848 when he had to flee again.) The house dates at least back to the start of the 1700s but is really in two parts, a plain long gallery and the Octagon Room which was designed by Scottish architect James Gibbs in extravagant baroque style. The gallery puts on a series of free art exhibitions. It has been nicely refurbished and the separate Stables Gallery and Stables Café are just behind.



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After Orleans House, continue along the river side, using either the lane or the green open space on your right. Suddenly you reach a large green space of Marble Hill Park. Turn **left** here on a lane, going away from the river. At the corner of the green, turn **right**, soon meeting an even larger green space. *You pass on your left the Coach House Café, perfectly sited for a breather but needing patience as they tend to run short of basic food items at peak times.* Continue in the same direction to meet another surprise: on your right, the Palladian villa, built for a royal mistress, **Marble Hill House**.



Marble Hill house was designed by Roger Morris and finished in 1729 as a retreat for royal mistress Henrietta Howard. She was born in 1689 and orphaned at twelve when her father was killed in a duel. Her first husband was a violent drunk and gambler and she found refuge (with her husband's agreement) as official mistress to the Prince of Wales who became King George II. Given a generous stipend, she had this house built in compact comfortable Palladian style. Henrietta married again, happily, and used her charm and wit to host regular literary get-togethers with her neighbours in fashionable salubrious Twickenham, including Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay (of the "Beggar's Opera") and Horace Walpole. The house is built and furnished in perfect Georgian style (it even has dummy doors to keep perfect symmetry). It is open by self-guided tour, Wed to Sun, from 10am, April to October, entry is free.

Turn **right** immediately before the house and go round to the back of the house to experience the view across to the Thames and imagine the clear view you will have from the other side of the river. Now go diagonally **right**, through an avenue of poplars and other trees and head across the green (or going round it if rugby is in progress) to find a gate on the far side, near to where you turned onto the lane earlier. Keep left to the river and turn **left** a very short hop to the landing stage of the Ferry. *Look down at your feet to see the arc-welded warning at the very beginning of the ramp "slippery when slippery".*

[The Twickenham ferry \(also known as the Hammertons Ferry\) runs from 10-6 \(6.30 weekends\) every day Mar-Oct. For winter times, it's advisable to check the website on "www.hammertonsferry.com" \(click "services"\) which also shows a phone number. It's a small boat and there's no timetable – it's simply on demand. Cost is £2 \(as 2023\) per person, extra for a dog if *not* on a lead.](http://www.hammertonsferry.com)

- 4 Having crossed the Thames, cross directly over, a fraction left, on a walkway and a diagonal path leading into the frontage of **Ham House** (National Trust) which is unmissable.

Ham House was built in 1610 and is the finest treasure from that period that you are likely to see. It was built by Sir Thomas Vavasour, possibly to get away from court scandals caused by his sister Anne who had married a sea captain and taken a string of lovers. At the same time, the future King Charles I was at school where misdeeds were corrected as expected. But, as he was a royal prince, a “whipping boy” had to take the punishments in his place. As you may imagine, a close bond developed between the prince and the whipping boy. For William Murray, who later became the king's trusted adviser, this became extremely profitable and the house was leased to him in 1626. After the Civil War, his daughter Elizabeth married Lionel Tollemache and the Tollemache family (later as Earls of Dysart) resided in Ham House till recent times when the house passed to the National Trust. The house is open every day, except Christmas, from 12 noon and the 17th-century garden from 10 am.

After your visit, cross back to the river side. **If you parked in the Ham House car park, it is a short distance on your left.** With the river on you left, walk downstream along the towpath, with the buildings on Richmond Hill in view ahead. You pass Petersham Lodge Woods.

Petersham Lodge was built in the early 1700s and was remodelled by John Soane (designer of the Bank of England and the Dulwich Gallery) in 1781. Until recently it was the home of Rolling Stones financial manager Prince Rupert, Count of Löwenstein-Scharffeneck, known outside his intimate circle by his Hispano-German name of Rupert Louis Ferdinand Frederick Constantine Lofredo Leopold Herbert Maximilian Hubert John Henry zu Löwenstein-Wertheim-Freudenberg. The house is private but the wonderful garden is open once a year for charity.



Petersham village makes a fascinating short visit for its ancient church, its narrow passages and the Petersham Nurseries with their modestly-named “teahouse” which once held a Michelin star for the fresh lunches you can eat in the greenhouse, surrounded by dangling pots of exotic greenery and growing flowers (see their website “petershamnurseries.com”).

Petersham Meadows where cattle sometimes graze are next. *The Star and Garter building dominates the hilltop – once a military rest-home, now luxury apartments.* As the path bends right, go **left** through a kissing-gate and take a short cut across the garden. On your right soon is a three-arch grotto and underpass leading to the Terrace Gardens where you will find the *Hollyhock Café* which has a loo. *The white square building up on your right is the Poppy Factory which produces the famous remembrance symbols for November.* There are various restaurants leading up to the arch under Richmond Bridge.



- 5 Continue along the river side, passing the big steps in front of Heron Square where at weekends there is usually a foody market. You pass the *White Cross*, a Youngs pub. Continue along the very fine pathway, until you are almost within touching distance of the railway bridge. Turn **right** here on Old Palace Lane, soon reaching the *White Swan*, a tiny pub with an excellent menu. *Over the wall on your right, on a large area stretching to the river is the site of Richmond Palace, once a rival to Hampton Court.* About half way down the line of white terraced houses, opposite number 17, turn **right** through a white gate. You quickly reach a courtyard. Keep **left** at the small lawn and go out through the Palace Gate Arch onto Richmond Green.



Richmond, the town and palace, are described in another walk in this series “Richmond and Petersham”.

Turn **right** on the perimeter lane for 20m and turn **left** on a diagonal path across the green. Cross a lane on the other side of the green and take a narrow passageway next to Danieli's chocolate shop. After a pub, several restaurants and boutiques, you come out to the main shopping street in Richmond. Turn **left**, soon reaching Richmond Railway and Underground Station.

If you arrived by car, and do not fancy walking back, you need to take a train or bus to **Twickenham**. Trains are frequent on all days and the journey is short (second stop) and within the Freedom Pass zone. Buses go over Richmond Bridge. Numbers H22, R70, R68 and 33 are all suitable: check locally.

Getting there

By car: Ham House car park can be reached via Richmond Park and Ham Common. Turn right on Ham Street and follow it to the end.

By train: Twickenham can be reached by frequent service from London Waterloo. Richmond can also be reached from Waterloo and is also on the London Underground, District Line.

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