

Unhistoric it may feel, but Wandsworth Road is the ancient route from London to West Surrey and Hampshire. On the far side of the road is the steep roof of Heathbrook School, (1886). The Westbury Estate, built by the GLC in 1964-7, has two tower blocks of the sort that Clapham escaped.

After the shops, just before the pedestrian crossing, you pass an alley on your right (Matrimony Place).

11. A little beyond the entrance to Matrimony Place, No. 575 was the house of Khadambe Asalache, a Kenyan poet, economist and UK civil servant, who filled it with his carvings. He bequeathed it to the National Trust, which now opens it to the public (as it is very small, prior booking is essential).

Turn into Matrimony Place and walk up the steps to St. Paul's Churchyard.

As you walk up the steps, traffic noise gives way to birdsong, and you reach the ancient churchyard of Clapham, now largely cleared of gravestones. The eastern side has been laid out as the Eden Community Garden. It's worth a detour to walk around this charming community garden.

St Paul's Church, built in 1815, extended in 1879, occupies the site of the medieval parish church, demolished when a new church was built on the Common. If the church is open, go inside to see the late 17th century Atkins monuments in the Lady Chapel and the memorial to William Hewer over the Lady Chapel door.

In front of the church, there is a small square, part of Rectory Grove.

12. This is the oldest part of Clapham. To your right, Nos. 8-10 Rectory Grove have handsome frontages of about 1800. Either at No. 8 or on a house previously on the site, Zachary Macaulay set up an African Academy to educate the sons of African families from Sierra Leone. The buildings to your left, adjoining No. 2A, Ingleton House, were the hall and chapel for a boys' home from 1912 to 1938. The chapel (No.4A) is now Clapham Pottery. Note another Clapham Society green plaque.

In Rectory Grove, go to the right, to the junction with Turret Grove.

13. The Elizabethan Manor House stood here. Demolished in 1837, after which the attractive villas in Turret Grove were built, its turret gave the name to the street. In Rectory Grove, Cromwell Cottages (Nos. 20-28) date from 1838.

The winding Rectory Grove was the main street of the old village, originally called just "The Street". Hope House c.1790, has door surrounds of Coade stone, an artificial stone manufactured on the South Bank. There are other large houses of the mid-19th century. The Rectory Gardens cottages, refurbished in 2021, are on the site of the former Holy Trinity Rectory.

14. The Victorian school building on your right is the former parochial school; a school has been on this site since at least 1648. The old building has been imaginatively adapted to house Lambeth's City Learning Centre.

After the City Learning Centre, cross over to the right hand side of Old Town.

The houses you now pass were described earlier in the walk. Across the road and to your left, after the Fire Station (1964) comes Maritime House, built as a seamen's union headquarters in 1939, hence the dolphins and ship's prow aloft. Now converted to housing. Next, Nos. 39-43, fine houses of 1706 (blue plaque to JF Bentley, the architect of Westminster Cathedral). No. 45 (a Charity shop), built about 1690, is believed to be the oldest building in Clapham.

Leaving the piazza to your left, walk to the road junction outside Omnibus Theatre.

15. Omnibus Theatre was built in 1889 as Clapham Library. In 2012, a new library was opened in Clapham High Street, and the old building was taken over by a locally formed trust, which has transformed it into an arts centre. The former use is recorded by a Clapham Society green plaque. Tucked away in the garden outside is a Roman memorial stone, now illegible, which came here via Cavendish House on South Side, but was earlier in the Tower of London.

Nearby on the Common, is Holy Trinity Church, built in 1774-6 as the new Parish Church for Clapham, and extended in 1903. It is associated with the Clapham Sect, religious and philanthropic campaigners.

This is the start of Clapham Common North Side, a walk in itself (Clapham Walk No. 7). To conclude the present walk, cross the road to go back along the edge of the Common to the Underground Station.



Clapham walks 1: Old Clapham

Lying off the main roads, Clapham was of little consequence until the 17th century. Then, it started to become a favoured residence of wealthy people from the City, who built the large houses in Old Town. In 1776, the small and much decayed medieval Church in Rectory Grove was replaced by the new Church on the Common, more centrally placed and far bigger. Clapham was growing fast, the old village giving way to the smart new houses round the Common.

The 19th century growth of London created the Clapham of today. In the first part of the century, Clapham continued to be favoured by the very rich, and this produced a mix from the large houses in Grafton Square to the humbler cottages off North Street. Gradually the open land was filled in, and among the houses were many small industrial sites. The 20th century saw all types of local authority housing, disappearance of most of the industries, and rapid social change, with new houses and flats, and the shops and restaurants which make up the urban mix of today. Recent changes have seen the transformation of the Old Town area into a hub of the café culture.

This walk starts at the modern centre of Clapham and tracks back through its past, to reach the oldest part of the once isolated medieval village, before returning to the Common. There are a number of detours down interesting side roads. The walk will take about 1½ to 2 hours, depending on how far you are tempted down the detours.

The Clapham Society is a local civic amenity society, which aims to improve the quality of life for residents, promote quality in new developments and to conserve the best features of the past. For further information please visit our website claphamsociety.com

Start at Clapham Common Underground Station.

1. The Underground reached Clapham Common in 1900. The present station is by Charles Holden, built in 1924 when the line was extended to Morden. The Clock Tower was a gift in 1906 from a Mayor of Wandsworth, the borough which then included Clapham. The half-timbered pub opposite, once The Plough, is actually a coaching inn of 1816 behind a mock Tudor refront of 1928. Over Waitrose (No. 5 The Pavement), a plaque to the Macaulay family, philanthropic campaigners.

The triangle of open space, part of the Common, has been improved by removal of railings and landscaping. The mounds cover Second World War air raid shelters.

Cross to The Pavement by the pedestrian controlled lights, and continue walking with the shops to your right.

2. In the row of mostly 19th century shops, the finest is No. 17, built in 1824, and a chemist's for 150 years. The original name Deane & Co can still be seen on the upper side wall.

3. After two blocks of 1930s flats and opposite a pub/restaurant, the old Fire Station (1868) is a rare survivor of the early years of the London Fire Brigade. Its former use is recorded by one of the Society's green plaques, others of which will be seen elsewhere on this walk. The pub on your right was once The Cock, and a pub has been here since at least the 18th century. Wingate Square is named after the proprietor of the grocery opposite.

On the other side of the road is The Polygon, built in 1792 but extensively rebuilt after Second World War damage. On the corner, No. 1 The Polygon, 19th century grocer's shopfront with oil jars.

Beyond the Polygon, the large open space, once given over wholly to buses, was landscaped in 2014 to create an urban piazza – this will be seen on the return journey.

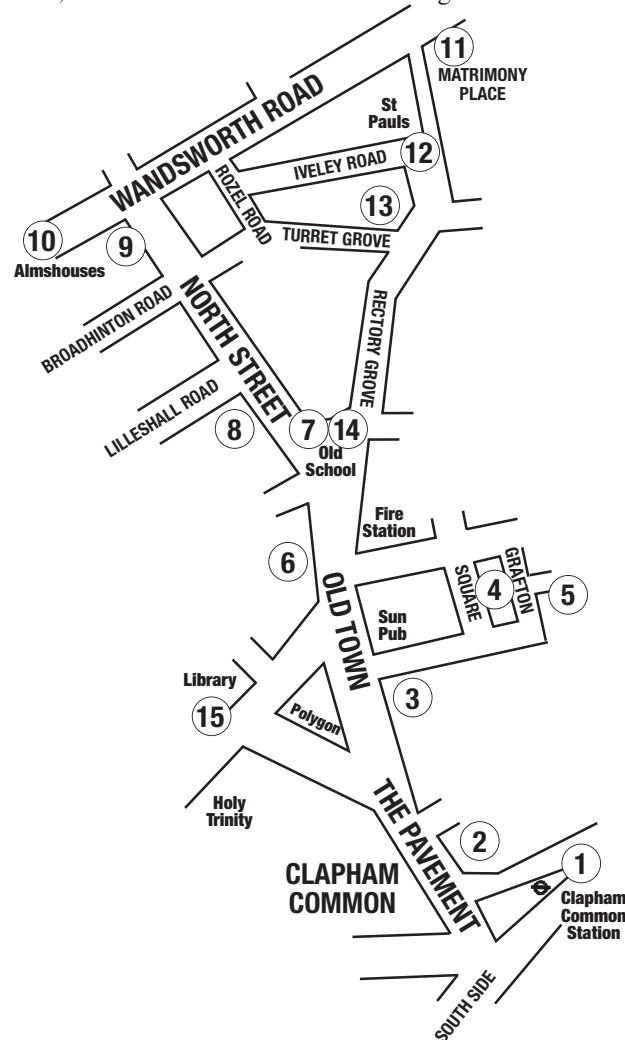
We now detour away from Old Town. Turn right just before the Sun PH, into Grafton Square, and walk round the square.

4. Grafton Square was developed in 1846-51 by an Irish militia Captain, Thomas Ross. The smaller houses, Nos. 1-3, were there when he started, and Ross incorporated them in his scheme. He built the tall flamboyant terraces, round a central garden, more typical of Kensington than Clapham.

5. At the far side of the square, by a red pillar box, Belmont Road leads to Clapham Manor School. It is worth a detour to see the ultra-modern extension to the school, by architects dRMM, shortlisted for the Stirling Prize in 2010.

Leave the square by the road passing a former church, walk to Old Town and there turn right.

The former People's Church, in the north-west corner of the square, is an imposing classical building of 1882-9, altered c1910, and converted in 2007 into housing.



6. Over the shops on the other side of Old Town, there is a coat of arms with the motto "Contentment passe richesse" said to have come from the former Manor House.

This part of Old Town has fine Georgian houses of the 1780s. No.23, on your right just past the Fire Station, has good Grade II listed railings. Sycamore House, opposite, a large house set back from the road, was once the main office of a grand laundry with Royal appointments. It also has a Clapham Society green plaque recording the former use.

Cross Old Town, and where the road forks, bear left into North Street.

7. The old school building, now the City Learning Centre, is described on the return journey.

Continue along North Street to the junction with Lillieshall Road.

8. Around this junction is a pretty cluster of terraces and cottages, the terraces of the 1830s and the cottages (Grade II listed) about 1827-9. This part of Lillieshall Road was then Orchard Street, and it ended at the village Cricket Ground. The Bobbin, a small but elaborate pub of 1887, is named after Tim Bobbin, an 18th century caricaturist and writer of humorous pieces in Lancashire dialect.

At Broadhinton Road, it is worth another short detour to look at two rows of pretty terraced houses, all 1863.

At the end of North Street, turn left at the lights.

9. Here is a large flamboyant pub (1876), currently closed. This was once the Nag's Head, replacing a much older pub of the same name – North Street was originally Nag's Head Lane. Opposite, the Plough Brewery, now offices, was built about 1870, replacing an older brewery, at one end of a terrace called Brewhouse Buildings (c.1810).

A detour to your left along Wandsworth Road brings you to the Hibbert almshouses.

10. The almshouses were founded in 1859 by two sisters, the last Clapham members of the Hibbert family. The Hibberts' fortune came from slave plantations in Jamaica, and George Hibbert MP, uncle of the founders, was one of Wilberforce's leading opponents.

Return to the traffic lights and continue along Wandsworth Road, until you reach a row of shops on your right. But please note that there will be some steps; if that will be difficult for you, turn right into Iveley Road, at the end of which you re-join the route at 12.