

Spas, Springs and Wells in South London

A geotrail between Sydenham and Dulwich

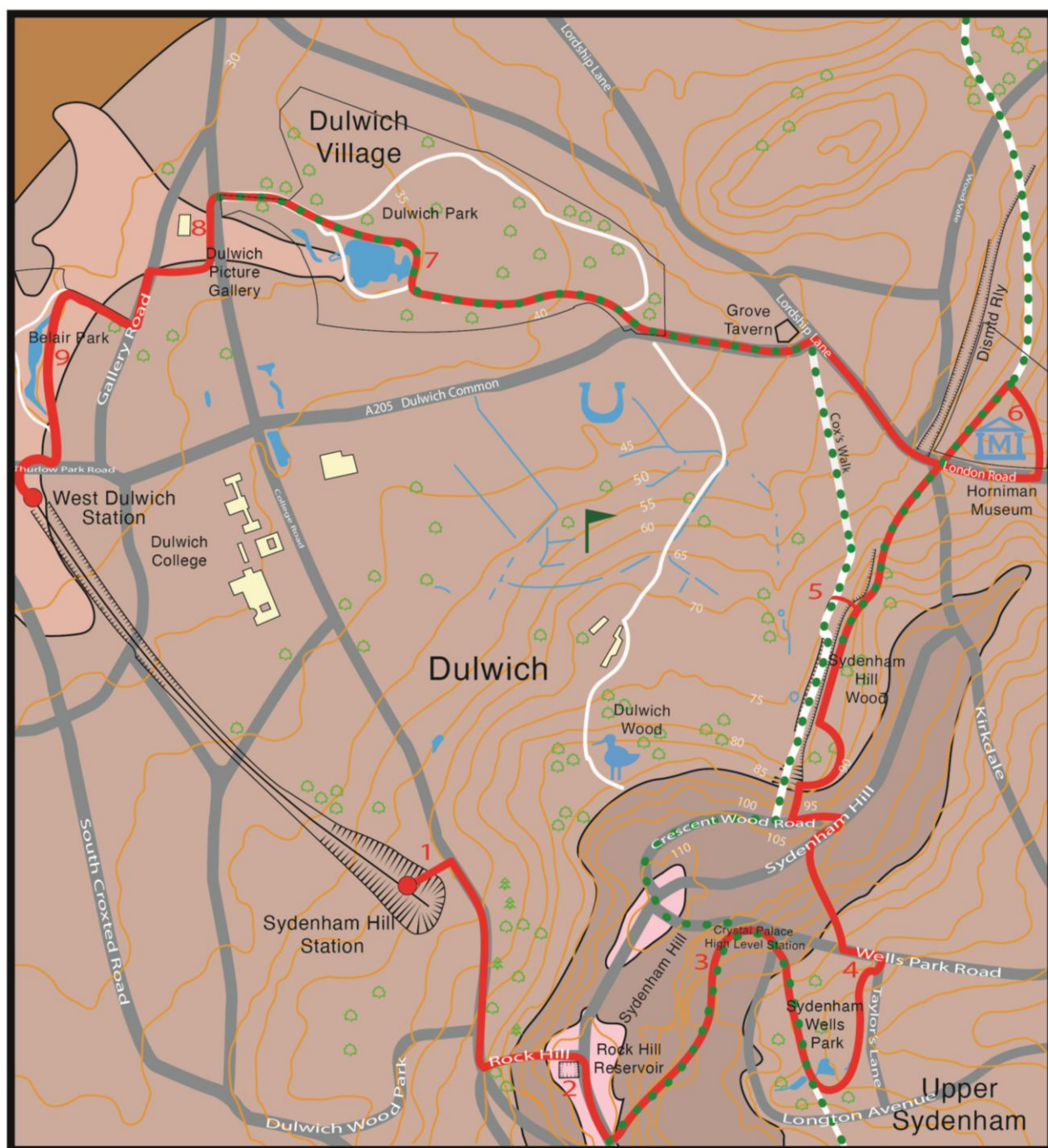


**Dedicated to the memory of Paul Rainey
who had the original idea and developed this geotrail**



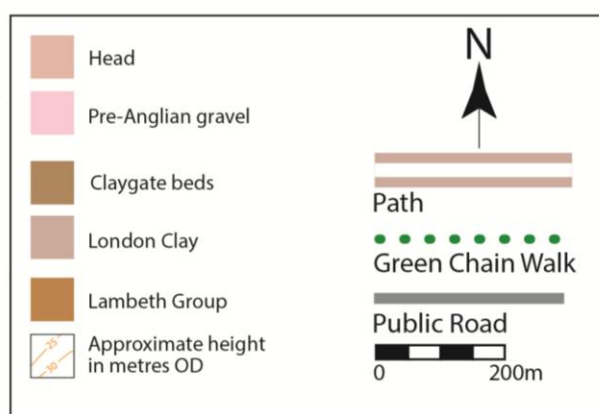
<https://londongeopartnership.org.uk>

Introduction

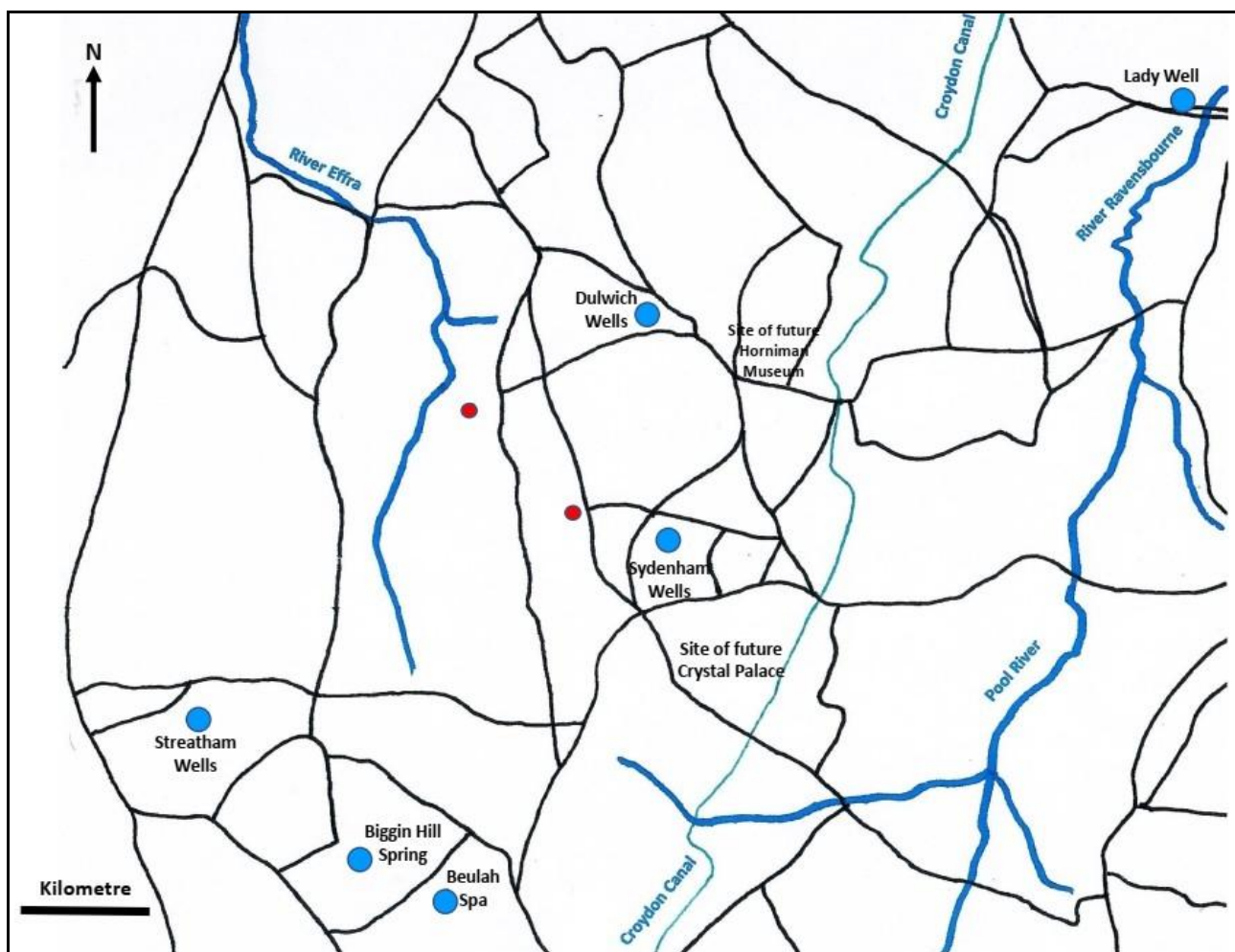


Geological map showing the route and Points of Interest (numbered) along the Sydenham – Dulwich Geotrail of Spas, Springs & Wells.

Based upon 1:10,000 TQ37NW and TQ37SW with the permission of the British Geological Survey.



In 2015 the London Geodiversity Partnership developed an eight kilometre (five-mile) Geological Trail between Sydenham Hill and West Dulwich railway stations. This was largely the work of Paul Rainey who was an expert in things hydrological. Unfortunately Paul died in January 2023 and his colleagues have decided to publish details of the Geotrail in his honour. It takes in spas, springs and wells along the way described over nine points of interest (POI). The route goes through Sydenham Wells Park, Sydenham Hill Woods Nature Reserve and Horniman Museum and Gardens, which makes a convenient half-way stop for lunch with a magnificent view across London. The walk continues through Dulwich Park, past Dulwich Wells with a discussion on the route of the River Effra in Belair Park to reach West Dulwich station.



Location map of the Spas, Springs and Wells of South London

A sketch map based on the 1805 OS map of south London showing spas, wells and springs at Streatham Spa (1659), Biggin Hill Spring (1809), Beulah Spa (1831), Dulwich Wells (1739), Sydenham Wells (1648), Lady Well (1799) with dates of first record

● Location of West Dulwich and Sydenham Hill stations

The walk is along footpaths, mostly metalled and is hilly in parts. Sections of the walk coincide with the Green Chain Walk. There are car parking facilities at the east exit to Sydenham Hill station but no toilets. Toilets and refreshments are available at the Horniman Museum, Dulwich Park and Dulwich Art Gallery. Toilet facilities are also available near the end of the route in Belair Park.

1

POI 1: Sydenham Hill Station (TQ 3354 7124)

From either platform on this station one can see right through the Sydenham Hill Tunnel to Penge (1,934 yards long or 1,768 metres). It is lined with yellow bricks said to have been made on site from London Clay that was tunnelled through. It was opened to traffic in 1863 by the London, Chatham and Dover Railway.

The station is on the western side of Sydenham Hill. There is more about this north-south ridge at PO3 Sydenham Hill (Claygate Ridge) and the Crystal Palace high-level railway.

Leave the station from the north-east exit heading up the alley-way to College Road, cross the road then turn right up the hill. After about 500m turn left through a white picket gate and up the path marked on maps as Rock Hill (known locally as Stony Hill) through Dulwich Wood. There are many manholes, etc. beside this path, an indication of the mains pipes laid here to take filtered River Thames water up to Rock Hill Reservoir in 1857.

2

POI 2: Rock Hill Reservoir (TQ 3390 7176)

Springs on the western side of Sydenham Hill feed into the River Effra which runs underground through Dulwich and Herne Hill towards the River Thames. In 1857, the Lambeth Water Company rented a site at the junction of Rock Hill and Sydenham Hill. Here they constructed a reservoir to serve Forest Hill and Lower Sydenham.

The Rock Hill reservoir was demolished in 1984 but the arches were left there as a feature. The site is now used as an electricity sub-station. The reservoir has been replaced by a larger one in Crystal Palace Park.

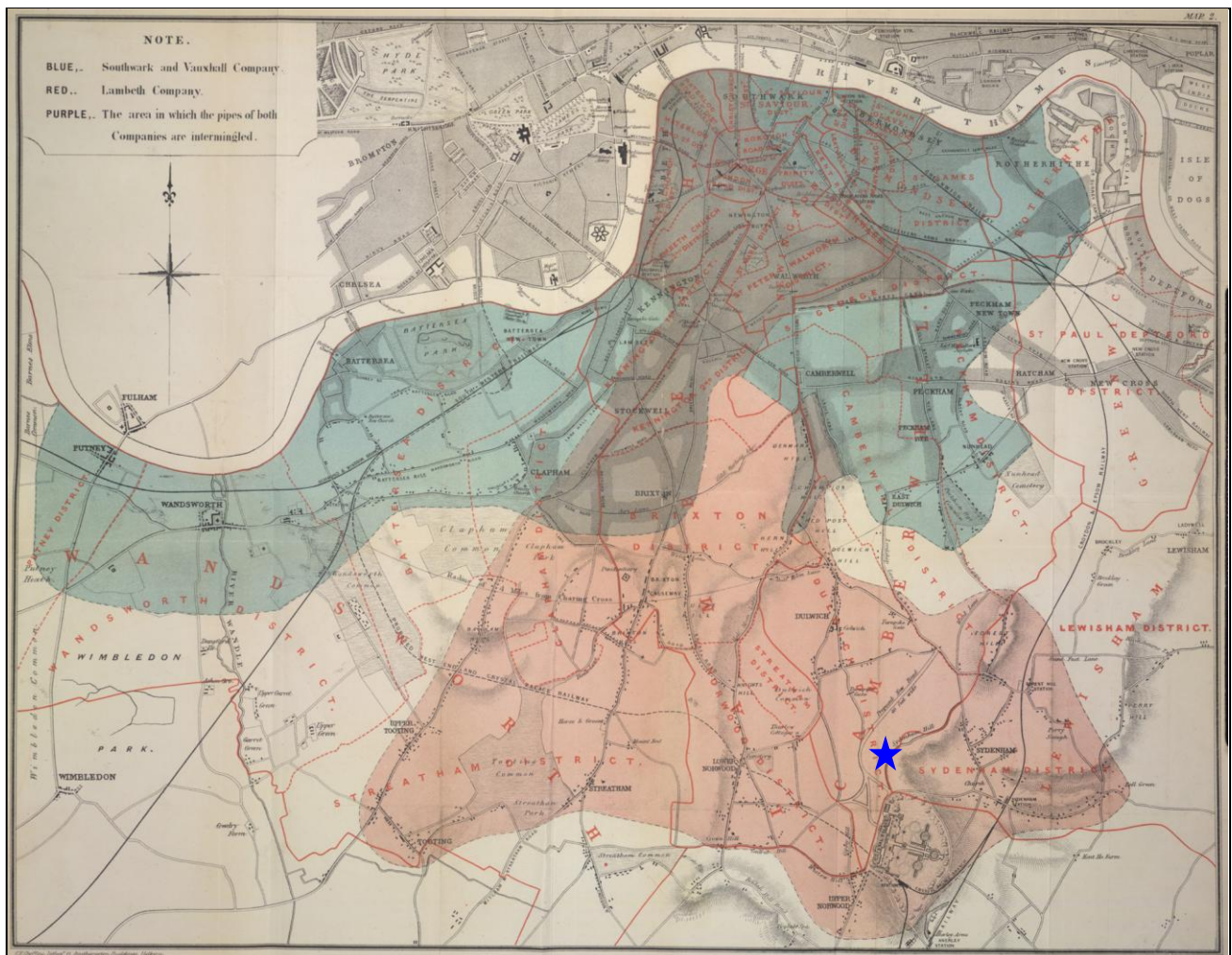


Arches, all that remain at site of Rock Hill reservoir

Photo: L Baker

In the 1848 cholera epidemic John Snow demonstrated a clear relationship between the numbers of deaths and the quality of the water supply. By the 1854 cholera epidemic Lambeth Water Company had been in 1852 the first (and was still the only) company to take its Thames water from Thames Ditton, a point upstream of Teddington Lock. He realised that the fact that in many streets of South London some houses were supplied by the Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company and some by

the Lambeth Water Company provided the opportunity for his “Grand Experiment” to test the evidence. So in the first six weeks of the 1854 epidemic he visited every house in those areas supplied by both companies where there had been a cholera death (around 1,000) and discovered their main source of water. He showed that in every such parish deaths from cholera were much more likely to be in houses supplied by the Southwark and Vauxhall Company than in those supplied by the Lambeth Company. Overall you were eight times more likely to die in houses supplied by the Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company (whose intake was in Battersea) than in those supplied by the Lambeth Company.



Map of areas in South London supplied by the Lambeth Water Company (pink) and Southwark and Vauxhall Water Company (blue). Star shows the approximate location of Rock Hill reservoir.

Deaths from Cholera during the epidemic of 1854 totalled 5,078, of which 3,706 were in the Southwark & Vauxhall Water Company area and 411 in the Lambeth Water Company area, a 9 to 1 difference, showing that upstream of the tides was clearly safer. (961 deaths had water from other sources.) See Snow, 1856.

Turn right, uphill, along Sydenham Hill towards the Crystal Palace Mast, passing Fountain House (no. 17) with a blue plaque where Sir Francis Pettit Smith, pioneer of the screw propeller, lived 1864-1870. About 20m beyond, cross the road and turn left

into Bluebell Close on the Green Chain Walk, an alleyway between holly and iron fences. It very soon starts a steep descent into Hillcrest Estate. Look out for a fallen tree showing sandy silt of the Claygate Beds at the top of the London Clay.

At the bottom of the path follow the Green Chain walk by turning left along High-Level Drive and then left into Vigilant Close. At the end go onto a path, approximately on the line of the former railway to the Crystal Palace High Level Station. Follow the path passing over the southern entrance to the 400-yard double bore Crescent Wood Tunnel. It was opened on 1 August 1865 and the line was finally closed in 1954. The path continues up to Wells Park Road where you turn right.



Southern portal to Crescent Wood Tunnel (TQ 3423 7201)

Photo: L Baker

3 POI 3: Sydenham Hill (Claygate Ridge) and the Crystal Palace railway

Sydenham Hill is a long thin ridge of rocks younger than the London Clay. The sandier horizons at the top of the London Clay were deposited in a near-shore environment and are known as the Claygate Beds (about 50 million years old). It is this horizon that was favoured by the brick makers. At the top of the hill there is a covering of a much younger rock. This is gravel but the origin here on Sydenham Hill is a bit anomalous. The British Geological Survey just show it as Pre-Anglian Gravel which means that it is probably between 2 million and c.500,000 years old. The gravel was quarried for use in construction work.

The ridge runs from South Norwood (112m) in the south to Forest Hill (106m) in the north. Crystal Palace in the middle is 110m, one of the higher hills in London (Shooters Hill is 132m and Hampstead Heath is 134m). The famous mast on the top at Crystal Palace can be seen from all over London and from as far away as Hampstead Heath in North London.

The Claygate Beds were described by William Whitaker, in 1889, from railway cuttings near Crystal Palace on the other side of the hill as: *“alternations of clay, Loam and clayey sand, flat and evenly bedded brown (except for the top 6ft or so, which is mottled bluish grey clay) with radiating selenite¹ crystals and many impressions of the same, and here or there a little laminated green sand.”*

The base of the Claygate Beds appears to be at 92.7m in the Crystal Palace borehole, about 80m in Sydenham Wells Park and then at about 95m at the north end of the Crystal Palace Ridge (due east of Cox’s bridge in Sydenham Hill Wood). The railway meanwhile climbed steadily southward from about 75m at Cox’s Bridge to about 90m at the High-Level station. Upper Sydenham station is almost exactly half way between these points, say 82 or 83m (i.e. very similar to the base of the Claygate Beds).

The next POI is Sydenham Wells Park but afterwards we will re-join the line of this former railway in Sydenham Hill Wood (PO 5) until the Horniman Museum.

On reaching Wells Park Road, turn right, still on Green Chain. Here is the former station master’s house and booking hall. Walk down the road, across Longton Avenue and then turn right into Sydenham Wells Park. Continue following the signs for the Green Chain Walk.

4

POI 4: Sydenham Wells Park TQ 3437 7186

Make your way to the open grass area where there are views over southeast London. Look for evidence of springs, marked by boggy patches or water-loving plants such as willow trees as you make your way towards the enclosure that marks the old well.

The site marking the well is close to the 75m contour and shown by a serpentine monolith in the right-hand photo. The rock commemorates the spa era but has no link to the story - it possibly came from the Alps and when fresh was an attractive, sparkly green colour.



A monolith of green serpentine rock commemorates the well.

Photo: L Baker

¹ selenite is calcium sulphate, from the same sulphate source as the spas.



Willows in Sydenham Wells Park in February 2014. Note the bogs in this area, close to the spring line. By 2023, the trees had almost fallen down. Photo: P. Rainey.

The junction of the sandy Claygate Beds and the clay-rich London Clay proper lies here just above the 75m contour which runs through Sydenham Wells Park. At this point groundwater is likely to emerge as a line of springs and it is probable that this is the reason for the boggy ground close to the willows in the winter. The location of the medicinal wells in the park is probably more complex. The water in the wells of Sydenham Hill has

been compared with that of Epsom as has the water at Beulah Spa on the other side of Sydenham Hill. An analysis of the water at Beulah Spa has been obtained which matches that of Epsom Salts very closely with two-thirds of the salts represented by magnesium sulphate (MgSO_4) and a further one-sixth is of common salt (NaCl). They are purported to have a strong and rather unpleasant taste together with medicinal qualities and it is thought that the wells at Sydenham possessed the same qualities. It is probable that the magnesium sulphate derives from weathering of the London Clay and water flows through the near surface shrinkage and drying cracks for which London Clay is notorious (see section on page 7). Epsom Salts is now obtained by evaporation from sea water.

There are many descriptions dating from 1640 when the medicinal water was first discovered. Peter in c.1680 says *“where now the wells are, there used to be only gushings of water, where multitudes of pigeons used to frequent”* (Foord, 1910)

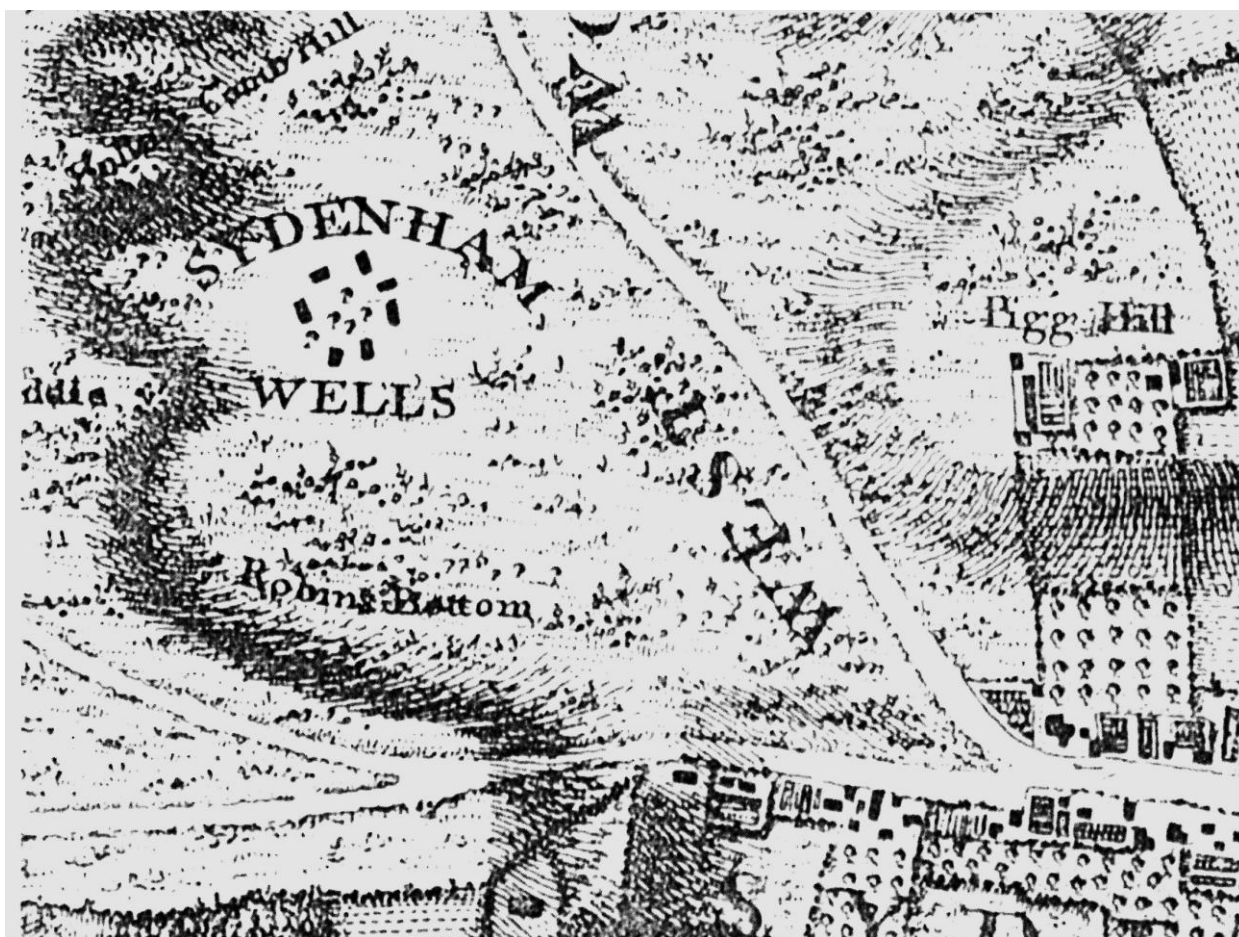
In the 1720's Daniel Defoe wrote:

“Near Bromley we turned away by Beckenham and through Norwood to Croydon; in the way we saw Dullige or Sydenham Wells, where great crowds of people throng every summer from London to drink the waters, as at Epsome and Tunbridge; only with this difference, that as at Epsome and Tunbridge, they go for the diversion of the season, for the mirth and the company; for gaming, or intriguing and the like, here they go for mere physick, and this causes another difference; Namely that as the nobility and gentry go to Tunbridge, the merchants and rich citizens to Epsome; so the common people go chiefly to Dullwich and Streatham; and the rather also, because it lyes so near London, that they can walk to it in the morning, and return at night.”

And, in 1729 the parish of Lewisham ordered in Vestry that:

“no water shall be carried from the Wells on Sidenham-Common, in the said Parish, for Sale”, and gave “the Publick Notice, thereof, that for the future no Persons may be imposed upon, by any that pretend to sell the said Water” although “Any Person may send as usual for any Quantity not exceeding Two Gallons for private Use.” (quoted in Curl, 2010)

Martyn reported in 1739: *“The old wells are at a distance from any house, except some few Huts, and exposed to the Rain and Land-floods, by which they are often injured”*. These springs seem to be those used by the modern line of ornamental ponds and waterfalls, probably with additional water as required. Ever since the Enclosure map of 1812, however, the principal wells appear to have been close to the northeast corner of the park with the “Green Dragon” on the north side of that road junction.

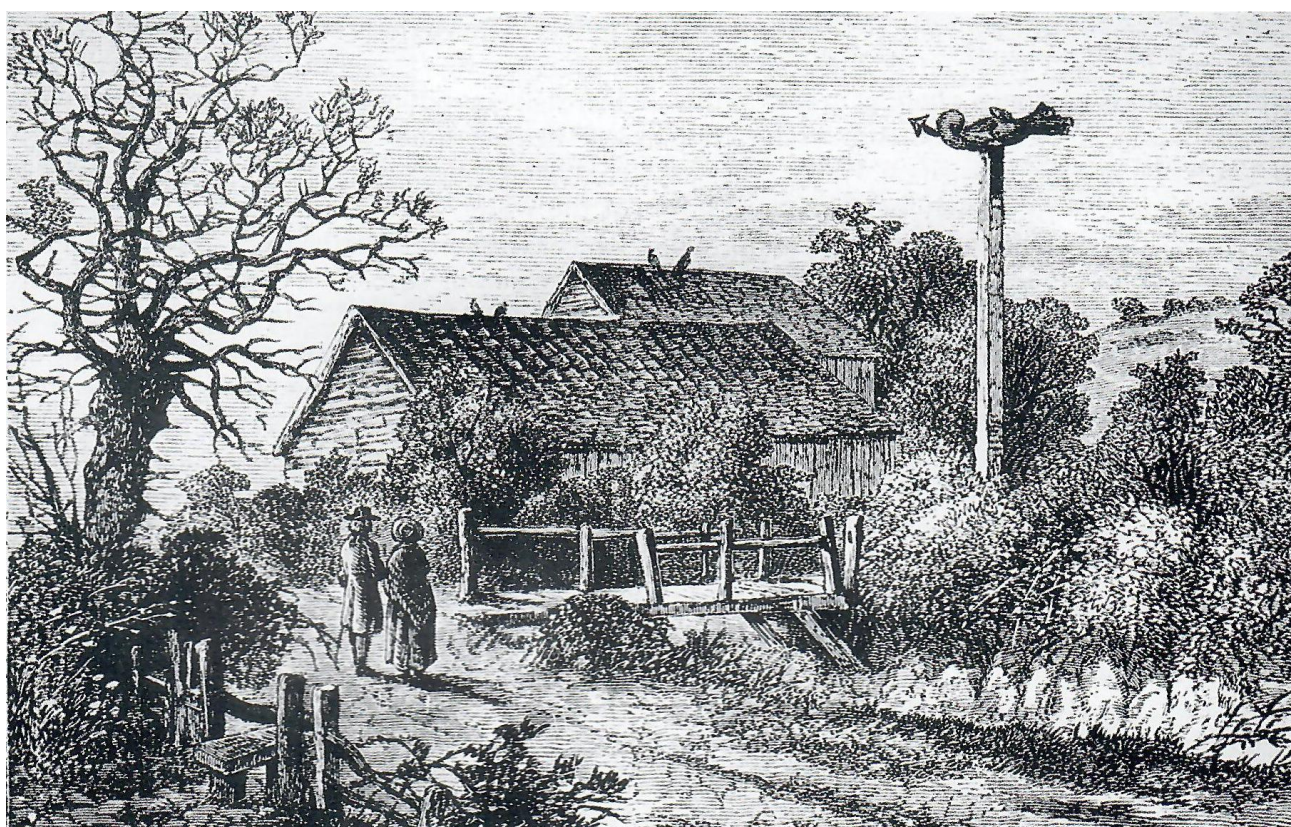


1741-45 Rocque's Map shows irregular cluster of seven buildings around site of well.

King George III was among those who visited the wells to take the water. On Saturday 23 June 1792, he reviewed the Coldstream Regiment of Foot Guards, with the Battalion of Grenadiers, on Sydenham Common.

"The manoeuvres of the troops on Sydenham Common were accompanied with some very diverting marches and counter-marches of the mob." (The Times 16, 18, 23, 25 June 1792)

It is said that he visited the wells several times and that a band played to drown out his cursing from the bitter taste of the waters. He stayed in a small wooden house – Dragon House – named after its model dragon gargoyle on a pole at its entrance. This eventually became Wells Cottage. It was on the corner of Wells Park Road and Oaksford Avenue. A bomb destroyed the cottage in 1944. (Coulter, 1999)



Sydenham Wells in 1750 and the sign of the *Green Dragon* (from Curl, 2010)

Towards the end of the 19th century there were concerns that the site would be built upon so a local campaign group was formed and successfully lobbied to save the site. Thus in 1896 the wells came into public ownership; purchased by the LCC for £7,210 with full possession coming in 1898. On 27 May 1901 Sydenham Wells Park opened, to the public. Landscaping of the park began in 1889, designed by Col. Sexby, chief officer of the LCC parks department. The ponds were renovated in 2000 and it is probable that the single well marked by its monolith was conserved at that time. This, however, seems suspiciously close to the Lavatory shown on the 1914 OS map and, hence, perhaps close to a supply of mains water. The spring water is no longer accessible. The park won the green flag award in 2012 and is a real gem.

It is worth taking a circular route around Sydenham Wells Park to enjoy the ornamental ponds near the southern edge and then climbing back up the hill on the

east side to exit the park at the Taylor's Lane exit. At the junction with Wells Park Road it is possible to look down the road to the crossroads where the Green Dragon formally stood on the northeast side.

The route back up to the top of Sydenham Hill can be found most simply by following Green Chain Route strictly along Wells Park Road but a loop can be cut off by going through Sydenham Hill housing estate by turning at the map and following the roadway, to go past Dundry House and up steps to emerge on Sydenham Hill, directly opposite Crescent Wood Road. The entrance to Sydenham Hill Wood is a short distance along Crescent Wood Road following the Green Chain Walk.

5

POI 5: Sydenham Hill Wood Nature Reserve TQ 5343 17131

There are various routes possible through Sydenham Hill Wood (display maps at the entrances show the layout of the woods), but the route on the east side will take you past the folly built of the 'false rock', Pulhamite. There is an explanation board and look out for the brick and clinker in the centre. The concrete covering making it look like rock is cement with ground pre-fired ceramic to give it durability. Follow the path to the bridge over the disused railway on the Green Chain Walk that joins Cox's Walk.



The folly. Photo: L Baker

These woods are part of Great North Wood that used to stretch between Selhurst and Deptford². Look out for natural springs, which do not relate to junction with Claygate Beds and probably arise from either more silty layers or rows of nodules within the London Clay. Above the exit of the tunnel (the other end of the tunnel seen just before POI 3) there appeared to be evidence of a spring and along the upper route a small pond marks the spot of another spring at a slightly lower level. The tunnel itself opened in 1865 and closed in 1954; many changes must have been made to the natural drainage to accommodate the railway.

Bridge over line of dismantled railway TQ 3445 7275 Note bridge is currently closed³. The plaque on the bridge shows Lordship Lane Station just to the north painted by Camille Pissarro in 1871. It gives a very evocative image that is now very overgrown.

² See London Wildlife Trust website: www.wildlondon.org.uk/greatnorthwood

³ The footbridge may open later in 2023 or in 2024. See www.tinyurl.com/mr2x6e7v



View north to Lordship Lane station, one of Pissarro's Pictures of London 1870 – 71

Source: www.artandarchitecture.org.uk/fourpaintings/pissarro/art/pictures_of_london.html

Pissarro painted thirteen oil paintings during his stay in London from December 1870 to July 1871. They all portrayed scenes and views close to where he lived in Upper Norwood. It is likely that they were painted 'en plein air', that is to say, outside and on the spot. The painting is currently at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

From the east side of the bridge over the former railway follow the Green Chain Walk to exit the wood at the Lapse Wood entrance/exit and continue (next to site of Lordship Lane station seen in the Pissarro painting) to arrive at the junction of A205 London Road and Sydenham Hill. Cross the main road on the pedestrian crossing and into the Horniman Gardens. Note the welded bricks in the retaining walls at this point – always an indicator that bricks were manufactured very close by. Climb up through the gardens towards the museum, turning left for the viewpoint.



6

POI 6: Viewpoint at Horniman Gardens TQ 3482 7327

Surprisingly views to the north from Sydenham Hill are a bit hard to come by in public open spaces and so it is pleasing that the Horniman Museum has renovated this area to make the most of the view. There is a Pavilion for hosting events, a bandstand and

an 'orchestra' of outdoor instruments as well as a well-placed interpretation board explaining the geology. Although the Crystal Palace mast can be seen from Hampstead Heath, the view from there is not reciprocal as it is fenced off but from here the Heath can be seen. It is the hill slightly west of due north, beyond the dome of St. Paul's.



Viewpoint in 2023 (Hampstead-Highgate ridge in background beyond St Paul's) Photo: L Baker

At 134m, Hampstead Heath is somewhat higher than Sydenham Hill (112m) where the Bagshot Sands overlies the full depth of the Claygate Beds (about 50 million years old). Both hills are topped by gravels aged between 500,000 and two million years old and at similar height but they may not be from the same source. The small patches of gravel on Hampstead Heath are closer to the former route of the Thames that used to run through the Vale of St. Albans to enter the North Sea near Clacton. This may relate to a tributary but currently it is not proven. When the great Anglian Ice Age was at its height about 450,000 years ago it blocked the Thames and as it melted pushed the



Photo: L Baker

route further south, more or less to its present course through, what is now, London.

In only 400,000 years the Thames has carved the deep valley you see before you. It is hard to imagine that before then rivers flowed over the area from the Weald to join the ancestral Thames on the ridge beyond Hampstead Heath. The diagram below shows the line of the Thames and its tributaries.



Anglian glaciation and the diverted River Thames. Originally the tributaries from the Weald flowed through north London, depositing material to the Pre-Anglian Thames.
(After Bridgland & Gibbard 1997)

Subsequent ice-ages never reached as far as London but the effects of at least six phases of permafrost melting have helped to produce the deep incisions surrounding the remnant hills such as Sydenham Hill. During the Anglian Ice Age the ice sheet reached as far south as Finchley and Hornchurch in north London, pressing down the land with its weight. As it retreated, not only did vast amounts of water erode channels but very slowly the land rose again, allowing the incisions to become deeper.

Horniman Museum TQ 348 731

There are interesting exhibits, including a geological display in the museum. There is also a café and toilets.

After leaving the museum café, turn left to reach the road. Cross the road and turn right down London Road that leads into Lordship Lane. At the traffic junction, turn left into Dulwich Common. Opposite on the corner is the former site of the Green Man (now disused 'The Grove' public house). You are at the bottom end of Cox's Walk, where water was taken from Dulwich Wells (see PO7 below).

Dulwich Wells, like Sydenham Wells, was famous for its purgative waters. Here the land is considerably lower (near 50m contour) and very flat. There were no springs here and the well was sunk at the Green Man, which was initially abandoned at 60ft deep with no water but it did eventually fill up slowly as described by Martyn in 1740. The origin of the purgative water is found in weathered London Clay as at Sydenham (see cross-section on page 7).



Grove Cottage Ale House 1825-1865 (from Curl, 2010). This is shown as Bew's Corner on the 1862 Stanford Map. On earlier maps the former spa house was known as the Green Man.

In 1740 Martyn wrote about the Wells at Dulwich:

"There has not been any medicinal spring observed in Dulwich, before that which is the Occasion of this Discourse.

In the Autumn of 1739, Mr Cox, the Master of a well-known House of good Entertainment, called the Green Man at Dulwich, lying about a Mile beyond the Village, was desirous to dig a Well for the Service of his House, there being no Spring of good Water near it"....." The first 20ft in depth seemed to be only the Clay, which, in a long Tract of Time, had been washed off from the steep Hill, at the foot of which his House is situated. It was intermixed

with Pieces of Roots and Leaves, and with other Fragments of vegetable Substances. In digging 40 Feet deeper, the Clay was found of various Colours, brown, blueish, and black; with a considerable Number of Pyritae or Copperas Stones, and some large masses of the Waxen-vein or Ludus Helmontii [probably septarian nodules in modern terms], which is also found in good plenty on the sea-shore near the Spaw at Scarborough.

The Well being digged to the Depth of 60 Feet and no Water appearing, Mr Cox caused it to be covered up..... The following Spring, on my coming down, it was opened. I found 25 ft of water, of a sulphureous Smell and Taste, which went off, after the well had been opened some days."

"Having made (some) experiments, I was satisfied that this new Spring was really a Purging Water, as it has since been found by Experience."

"The Ludus Helmontii affords nothing but iron. Nor does the clay, through which they dug, discover any salt in its composition. We may therefore conclude, that the hill, which lies between the old wells and this new one, contains the purging salt, with which these waters are impregnated"

"I do not find any material difference between the old and new waters, except in the Convenience of drinking them"

"The new Well is a Mile or two nearer to London, well secured from any Injuries of the Weather"

In 1915 Sunderland observed that the waters used to be drunk on the premises, sold on the streets of London and supplied regularly to St. Bartholomew's Hospital. A 1762 advertisement announced *"The purging waters now in their proper season for drinking. The Great Breakfast Room at the 'Green Man,' Dulwich, opened 16th May, 1748, and continued every Monday during the Summer season, at one shilling each person."*

After the death of Francis Cox in 1774, his son William sold his interest in the Green Man to one James Rowles, a wine merchant in Westminster. It is still shown on J Cary's Map of 1786 along with Dulwich Wells to the west, and Sydenham Wells. By 1792 The Green Man had become a private house, and soon after a school, which lasted until about 1825 when it was demolished. Bew then opened an ale-house on the site, calling it Grove Cottage. The grander Grove Hotel was on the site in the early 1860s, lasting until 1923, when it was replaced by the Grove Tavern, which is now closed (Sunderland 1915, Curl 2010).

The Dulwich Wells continued to be shown on maps, until the 1862 Stanford's Library Map, at a site behind the lodge, but then became The Elms and what is now the bowling club just outside the park, close to the present Rosebery Gate. This is in the valley bottom, a probable site for shallow wells. This suggestion is supported by the

presence of a watercourse starting here shown on the 1870 OS map. This watercourse becomes the stream that has been developed into the lake of Dulwich Park.



Rocque's Map of Surrey in 1762 showing Brick kiln, Dulwich Wells and to the right, the Green Man

Follow the Green Chain Walk along Dulwich Common, crossing at the pedestrian refuge into Dulwich Park through Roseberry Gate.

Dulwich Park today (café and toilets)

In 1890 Dulwich Park opened as a public park. It is a very flat area but it incorporated attractive ponds with wooden walkways over them. The ponds were especially dug for the park in 1887 (the area originally formed five fields). The park had been in a state of decay until it was conserved by the Friends of Dulwich Park. From Dulwich Park there are views to the south of Sydenham Hill with the distinctive television mast at Crystal Palace. The Park has obtained Green Flag status and is well maintained.

Make your way along the roadway/horse ride to the left. Just past the children's play area turn right (TQ) to the pond. Walk over the boardwalk (by red life-jacket) that

goes through the wildlife area. At the end turn left, picking up the Green Chain Walk to exit the park at Old College Gate onto College Road. Cross the road into the grounds of Dulwich Picture Gallery then turn left to the 'Walking the Dog' sculpture.

8

POI 8: *Walking the Dog* sculpture by Peter Randall-Page **TQ 3310 7354**

Walking the Dog, by leading British sculptor, Peter Randall-Page, was presented by the Art Fund to the Dulwich Picture Gallery to mark its bicentenary in 2011. It is the first sculpture to be included in the Gallery's permanent collection. These boulders are the original shape of glacial erratics from the Satakunta Region in Southwest Finland. It is not permitted to take eroded boulders out of the landscape, so they have been collected from aggregate quarries. In carving these boulders the sculptor, Peter Randall-Page, was influenced by Sir John Soane's 'running dog' pattern visible on the external walls of the Gallery. The pattern is also known as the Vitruvian scroll or wave scroll. Earliest examples appear in Anatolia in the sixth millennium BC. Today these patterns are closely associated with Greek architecture.



The *Walking the Dog* sculpture in 2014, which have become weathered since. Photo: L. Baker

At the time of collection of these brownish/red boulders it was noted that many were nearly identical in terms of rock type, colour and mineralogy, with very few variants, thereby pointing to a local source nearby, and/or one of large size somewhat further away. These glacial erratics were probably transported by the Scandinavian Ice sheet in the Weichsellian ice age 115,000-9,000 years ago. It is possible they may have

originated from the Obbnas granite, which is very similar in appearance (Salonen & Palmu, 1989). For more information see: www.peterrandall-page.com

Peter Randall-Page

Born 1954

Walking the Dog I, II & III

2009

The three granite boulders in front of you were carried by a glacier and left stranded in Finland when the ice melted at the end of the last ice age, more than 10,000 years ago. These types of rocks are known as glacial erratics. The sculptor Peter Randall-Page, who cites the study of natural phenomena as a key inspiration for his work, preserved the boulders' original shapes that were created by millennia of erosion. The artist carved the surfaces with an interlocking pattern evoking the Greek key or meander motif. This pattern is named after the Meander, a river in Turkey that follows a twisting path doubling back on itself. The meander was a common ornament in ancient Greek and Roman architecture. You can find the same motif on the frieze (the stone band between the top of the brick walls and the roof) of Sir John Soane's Dulwich Picture Gallery building.

Granite

DPG S6a, S6b, S6c – Purchased with a grant from the Art Fund, 2010

Peter Randall-Page (born 1954) is one of Britain's foremost artists for the outdoor environment. He studied sculpture at Bath Academy of Art in 1973–77. Randall-Page has created numerous public sculptures for urban and rural locations throughout the UK and internationally. His other major work in the local area is the façade of the Laboratory at Dulwich College (2016, designed in collaboration with Grimshaw Architects), which won a RIBA National Award and a RIBA London Award from the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was elected a Royal Academician in 2015.

Continue along the path to exit the Dulwich Picture Gallery gardens to Gallery Road. Turn left and walk to pedestrian crossing. Immediately across the road is the entrance to Belair Park.

Make your way to the ponds that run through the middle of the park.

Walk on the east side of the pond where there is access to the pond and there are seats

It is tempting to think that the elongated Belair Pond is the only surviving visible remnant of the Effra River whose source is from springs in Westow Park in Upper Norwood. It was covered by the development of suburbs in mid-19th century. The river runs through the Dulwich area passing beneath Thurlow Road by West Dulwich station flowing to the west of the railway line.

When John Willes built Belair House after 1785 he intended to use clay dug on site to make his bricks. This might have been the origin of the lake. The 1805 edition OS map pre-dates the railway and shows the Effra flowing close to Croxted Road at the western boundary of Belair Park but later maps show the Effra following Croxted Road to the west of the railway and crossing the railway north of Belair Park; clearly the railway embankment will have affected the pattern of surface run-off. The ponds were probably dug for ornamental purposes or for fish and it is more than probable that the water used to fill them was diverted from the nearby Effra.



Pond in Belair Park, February 2023 Photo: L Baker

The river, underground now, continues through Brixton to its confluence with the Thames on the upstream side of Vauxhall Bridge, an area once known as Vauxhall Creek.

Belair Park has been very prone to flooding; there is a completed flood alleviation scheme both here and in Dulwich Park where they have built clay 'bunds' to contain the excess water. This was part of the Herne Hill and Dulwich Flood Alleviation Scheme developed by Southwark Council to protect over 400 properties; see www.tinyurl.com/2p9asekw

There are toilets near the park buildings. To exit the park, turn right at the southern end of the elongated pond, leading onto Thurlow Park Road. Immediately opposite is entrance to West Dulwich Station and the end of the Geotrail.

Sites not part of this geotrail but shown on the page 3 map.

Beulah Spa (TQ 327 698) opened in 1831 and closed in 1856 due to the competition of Crystal Palace, which opened in 1851. It was a popular natural chalybeate and saline spring that Michael Faraday analysed as one of the purest in the country. It was very popular and fashionable; Queen Victoria visited four times. The entrance was at the corner of Spa Road and Beulah Hill (now private house).



Tivoli Lodge, the entrance to Beulah Spa. Photo: L Baker



The plaque erected in 2015. Photo: L Baker.

Lady Well was a mineral spring known from 1472 with claims to help those with poor eyesight, which may have run dry after a local sewer was constructed 1855-56. In 1880 there was subsidence at the end of the bridge over the railway. Two plaques have been erected: one at 148 Ladywell Road (TQ 373 747) in 1987 and one on a housing block near Ladywell Station in 2015 (TQ 377 747)

Streatham Wells (TQ 309 708) are located in what is now the Rookery, next to Streatham Common. Between 1659 and 1791, these mineral wells made Streatham a spa attraction during the 18th century. This led to Well house (later The Rookery) being built in 1783. The mineral wells here became contaminated by 1792, and the spa was moved to Valley Road. Although much of the remnants are replaced by public gardens, the 'wishing' well within the gardens is a reminder of Streatham's spa past.



'Wishing' well at Rookery.
Photo: L Baker

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- The Green Chain walk guide sections have been completely rewritten by the Inner London Ramblers. Sections 11 and 11a are relevant to this geotrail. All sections are online at www.tinyurl.com/mu9snjxn