

The Nelson Trail

The Nelson Trail has been designed to allow people to walk in the footsteps of Britain’s greatest naval hero, Admiral Lord Nelson.

The London Borough of Merton has a number of sites associated with the life of Nelson. These range from historic buildings and churches, to the site of the Admiral’s former residence Merton Place as well as land owned by his friends and neighbours.

Although his residence here was punctuated by lengthy periods at sea, Nelson loved the peace and charm of the area he termed “dear, dear Merton.”

For a brief period during the early 1800s, Nelson shared Merton Place, with his lover Emma Hamilton and her husband, Sir William, (a former diplomat and patron of the Arts.) This bizarre domestic arrangement scandalised British society, however Nelson’s status as a national hero endeared him to the local population.

All the sites included are accessible by public transport. A number of buildings are open to the public or by prior appointment and you can cover most of the trail in one day.

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Church of St Mary the Virgin

Church Path, Merton Park



History

The Domesday survey of 1086 refers to Merton as a settlement with a church and two mills. This Saxon church was probably a simple wooden structure with daubed walls and a thatched roof. It does not seem to have survived long into the Norman period.

The first stone church in the district was built in 1115, on the orders of Gilbert the Norman, Sheriff of Surrey and founder of Merton Priory. A small, solid building with rounded windows and door arches, sparse furnishings and a rush-strewn floor, it was dedicated to the honour of the most Blessed Mother of God and ever Virgin Mary.

The building was much altered during the 12th and 13th centuries. Doorways were refashioned, the nave lengthened and internal décor added, including stained glass and carved statues. The main framework of the current church dates from the 14th century and some Medieval details survive. These include the North door, which features a Norman arch (1121) and 14th century woodwork; the dripstone above the West door, thought to portray Edward III and Queen Phillippa and the Priest's door, which leads to the modern vestry.

The most splendid Medieval survival is surely the roof, described as one of the most beautiful examples in England. It includes 12th century cross-beams – a gift from King Henry III and carved chestnut supports dating from the 14th century.

Lord Nelson

One of the most famous patrons of the church was Admiral Horatio Nelson, who lived at Merton Place between 1801 and 1805. During his day, the church had wooden box pews and a gallery to the rear of the nave. These were removed during the 19th century, however Nelson's pew survives at the front of the church.

Funerary hatchments, painted coats of arms commemorating Nelson and his friend Sir William Hamilton, can also be seen in the church.

Victorian additions

The north and south aisles of the church were added during the Victorian period. These house a number of beautiful stained glass windows designed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, friend and business partner of William Morris.

The series of Biblical scenes was produced at the Morris & Co. works at Merton Abbey. It commemorates John Innes, horticulturalist, philanthropist and the man responsible for the development of Merton Park.



Memorials

Many of the other windows in the church commemorate former vicars and much-loved parishioners. Perhaps the most striking example is the east window in the chancel. The original was destroyed by a flying bomb in 1944. The replacement was dedicated in 1950 and has some quirky details, including the car registration number of the local vicar.

The church has a fine collection of memorials. Of particular note is the plaque commemorating Sir Gregory Lovell, Treasurer to Queen Elizabeth I.

Located near the chancel, it features likenesses of Sir Gregory, his two wives and nine children.

Also worthy of attention is the beautiful memorial to the Smith family. This was financed by Elizabeth Cook, widow of the explorer Captain James Cook.

Following the death of her husband in 1779, she settled at Abbey Gate House Merton, with the family of her cousin, Rear Admiral Isaac Smith. Isaac accompanied James Cook aboard the Endeavour, during its voyage to the Antipodes. He was the first man ashore following Cook's discovery of Australia in 1768.

The statue on the memorial was carved by R.J.Wyatt and depicts his sister, who married a nephew of Sir Isaac Smith but tragically died in childbirth.

Memorials to the dead of two world wars can be found in the Baptistry and the Augustine Chapel, off the south aisle.

The Priory Arch

Moving outside the church, your eye is caught by the Norman archway leading to the vicarage. This is thought to have been the gateway to the guesthouse at Merton Priory. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, it was recycled as part of the fabric of a house.

For many years the arch remained hidden under a layer of plaster. Following the demolition of the house in 1914, it was restored and moved to its current site in 1935, thanks to the generosity of Gilliat Edward Hatfeild, the last squire of Morden.

Famous graves

Many people of note are buried in the churchyard at St. Mary's, including William Rutlish, embroiderer to Charles II; Frances Nixon, who perfected the art of copper plate calico printing and John Innes, gardener, benefactor and town planner.

Opening Times

Open to the public weekdays 9 am to 12 noon and Sundays 11 am to 12 noon.

How to get there

The church lies 5-7 minutes from Merton Park Tramlink and a 7-10 minute walk from the following bus routes: 152, 163, 164.

Morden Lodge

Morden Hall Road

This site is not open to the public but is partly visible from the road.

During the early 19th Century, this was home to Abraham Goldsmid, an eminent Jewish financier of Anglo-Dutch descent and a senior partner in one of the Capital's most powerful brokerage firms, Goldsmid.

His friends included the Prince Regent, the playwright Sheridan and the Prime Minister, William Pitt. Lord Nelson was also a close personal friend and is known to have visited Morden Lodge on a number of occasions, accompanied by Lady Hamilton and members of their extended family.

After Nelson's death, Abraham and a group of fellow trustees gave £3,700 to save Emma Hamilton from spiralling debt. However by 1810, a risky Government loan threatened Goldsmid with bankruptcy and he committed suicide.

Morden Lodge was demolished and replaced by the current Georgian building in about 1820.

How to get there

8-12 minute walk from Morden Underground Station, or a short walk from the following bus routes: 80, 118, 157, 201.

Easy walking distance from the National Trust property, Morden Hall Park.

Mitcham Cricket Ground

Cricket Green, Lower Mitcham

Cricket is said to have been played here since the 1690s and Lord Nelson reportedly travelled from his Merton home to watch the local team in action. Prior to his departure for Trafalgar, the Admiral reputedly gave a young player a shilling, to “drink to the confusion of the French” forces.



In Nelson’s day, the Mitcham cricket team had changing rooms in the nearby Cricketers Inn, while the scorer was stationed on the pub balcony. The original inn was bombed during World War II and replaced by the current building in 1958. The Mitcham Cricket Pavilion dates from 1904; rather uniquely, a busy road separates it from the pitch itself.

How to get there

8-10 minute walk from Mitcham Tramlink, or close to the following bus routes: 118, 127, 200, 201, 270, 280, 355.

Eagle House

High Street, Wimbledon

Built around 1617 for Robert Bell, a wealthy London merchant, the house was bought by Reverend Thomas Lancaster in 1790 and became the “Wimbledon School for Young Noblemen and Gentlemen.”

In September 1805 Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton visited Wimbledon Academy, where they were greeted by the pupils and entertained with readings in the front parlour. The property was then re-named, “Nelson House School.”

How to get there

A short walk from the following bus routes: 93, 200.

Wandle Park

Wandle Park is a pleasant local amenity space off Merton High Street near to the town of Colliers Wood in the north of Merton. The park lies alongside the river Wandle, an area rich in early industrial history, and is of informal design consisting of grass, a linear path, with trees generally beside the river and newer wetland features.

The 19th century stone drinking fountain was erected through private subscription in memory of Robert Bloomfield Fenwick (1835-1897), who had lived at Wandle Park from 1867 to 1895 and was instrumental in the founding and building of All Saints Parish Church. It was formerly decorated with medallions of heads, now missing.



The park was once the site of Wandlebank House, built in 1791 by James Perry and owned by him until 1821. Perry owned the corn mill next door and was also editor of the 'Morning Chronicle', the most successful London newspaper in Georgian times. Corn milling had been an important industry on the Wandle from medieval times. Perry died in 1821 and is commemorated with a memorial at St Mary's Parish Church, Wimbledon.

Lord Nelson is thought to have visited Wandle Park House on a number of occasions, together with Emma and Sir William Hamilton. The house was demolished in 1962.

Location

Wandle Park occupies approximately 11 acres and is situated on the site of a former millpond; the River Wandle forms the boundary of the park. Wandle Park is an attractive natural amenity Park within the Colliers Wood Town in Merton. The site is bounded by Byegrove Road, Merton High Street and the River Wandle.

Public access is via Millars Mead Court, Baltic Close, behind flats along Byegrove Road and across the footbridge along the River Wandle. The main vehicle access is by the old lodge.

Transport

- Buses: 157, 52, 200, 219, 493, N155
- Tube: Colliers Wood Tube Station in Merton High Street, 2 minutes walk.
- Small car park suitable for 30 cars off Byegrove Road near the old Lodge.

Nelson Arms

15 Merton High Street

The pub marks the site of the lodge and entrance gates to Nelson's [Merton Place](#). The estate originally fell within two parishes. The southern part including the house and grounds lay in Merton, while the stables, gardens and remaining farmland lay in Wimbledon. A brick-lined tunnel passed under the road, allowing the residents of Merton Place to travel from one part of the estate to the other.



The current building dates from 1910. Its front is decorated with a unique series of murals by Garters of Poole, depicting Lord Nelson and HMS Victory.

How to get there

The pub stands at the junction between Abbey Road and Merton High Street.

It is a 5 minute walk from Colliers Wood, or South Wimbledon Underground Station and lies on the following bus routes: 57, 152, 200, 219, 493.

Merton Place

Former home of Lord Nelson.

Near Doel Close, High Path Estate



Early history

Originally known as Moat House Farm, Merton Place was built about 1750 for Mr Henry Pratt. It was enlarged by its subsequent owner, Sir Richard Hotham, a wealthy hat manufacturer, famous for the development of Bognor.

The estate later passed to Charles Greaves, a partner in a local calico-printing works.

Nelson arrives

By 1801, Lord Nelson, had separated from his wife Fanny and was keen to find a home where he could entertain his friends. Acting on his behalf, Lady Hamilton purchased Merton Place from Greaves' widow, for the sum of £9000.

Nelson first arrived in Merton on 23 October 1801 and is said to have been delighted with his new home. The house was initially a simple one-wing property with an annexe, however Lady Hamilton supervised its renovation. The greatest changes took place in 1805, when the architect, Thomas Chawner, created a new layout for Merton Place, transforming it into a fine double-fronted house, with a grand entrance. A new drawing room, kitchen, bedrooms and water-closets were added, in addition to an external walkway leading to a summer house. The fine gardens included a moat, dubbed "The Nile," in honour of Nelson's famous naval battle.

The years spent at Merton Place were amongst the happiest of Nelson's life. The house was regularly filled with guests, including the Admiral's relatives and fellow naval officers. Emma organised grand dinner parties and by September 1805, the couple had been joined by their daughter, Horatia, previously lodged elsewhere to avoid a scandal.

After Nelson's death at Trafalgar, Lady Hamilton's lavish lifestyle forced her into debt. Despite the efforts of a group of friends acting as trustees, it was necessary to sell Merton Place. Much of the property was purchased by the Goldsmid family but the house itself remained empty and was finally demolished in 1823. The majority of the land once owned by Lord Nelson now lies under housing and industrial premises.

Merton Place today

Much of the Merton portion of Lord Nelson's 160 acre estate now lies under High Path estate, a local government housing initiative started in the early 1950s. The name "Merton Place" was given to a block of flats which covers the site of the Admiral's former residence.

How to get there

The site lies within walking distance of South Wimbledon Underground Station and the following bus routes: 57, 93, 152, 493.

Gatehouse

Merton High Street

During the early 19th Century, this was the family home of James Halfhide, owner of a successful calico print works, situated to the rear of the house. During 1801, Lord Nelson is known to have purchased a strip of land from his neighbour, Mr Halfhide, for £23.



Halfhide & Son went bankrupt in 1804. Gatehouse was later owned by Charles Smith and his brother, Rear Admiral Isaac Smith. (The latter accompanied Captain Cook aboard “The Endeavour” and was the first Englishman to set foot on Australian soil.) In 1826, the Smith family acquired most of the Merton section of Lord Nelson’s former estate. This remained in their family until the interwar period, when it was used for a factory estate.

How to get there

Approximately 1-2 minutes walk from Wandle Park, this lies to the right of Savacentre, just past Mill Road.

This site is now covered by flats.

Church of St John the Divine and Nelson Gardens

High Path, South Wimbledon

Designed by Architect, C. Gage, the church was built in 1913/14 to mark the anniversary of the death of Lord Nelson. The Admiral's house, Merton Place, stood near the site and the church lies on ground formerly part of Nelson's 160 acre estate.

The church is Gothic in style and includes stained glass designed by the Pre-Raphaelite artist, Edward Burne-Jones, a partner in the successful art and craft works founded by William Morris and transferred to Merton in 1881. The altarpiece in the church is made from timber taken from Nelson's flagship, HMS Victory.

Like the church, Nelson Gardens Recreation Ground was created on a parcel of land donated by the great nephew of Rear Admiral Isaac Smith, to mark the centenary of Nelson's death. The site holds a commemorative plaque and a fine pair of 12 pounder guns, once thought to have adorned the lawn of Merton Place.

How to get there

The church is within easy walking distance of South Wimbledon Underground Station and the following bus routes: 57, 93, 152, 493.

