

Kensington is an affluent area with a wide range of building types from two storey terraces to large mansion blocks. There is a choice of four endings to this walk. I am indebted to Andrew Duncan's thoroughly recommended book *Favourite London Walks* for showing me the southerly east-west route.

Kensington walk-about

— Main route 6 km to High Street Kensington, 6.8 km via Holland Park, 7.1 km to Queensway or 8.8 km to Hyde Park Corner

— options

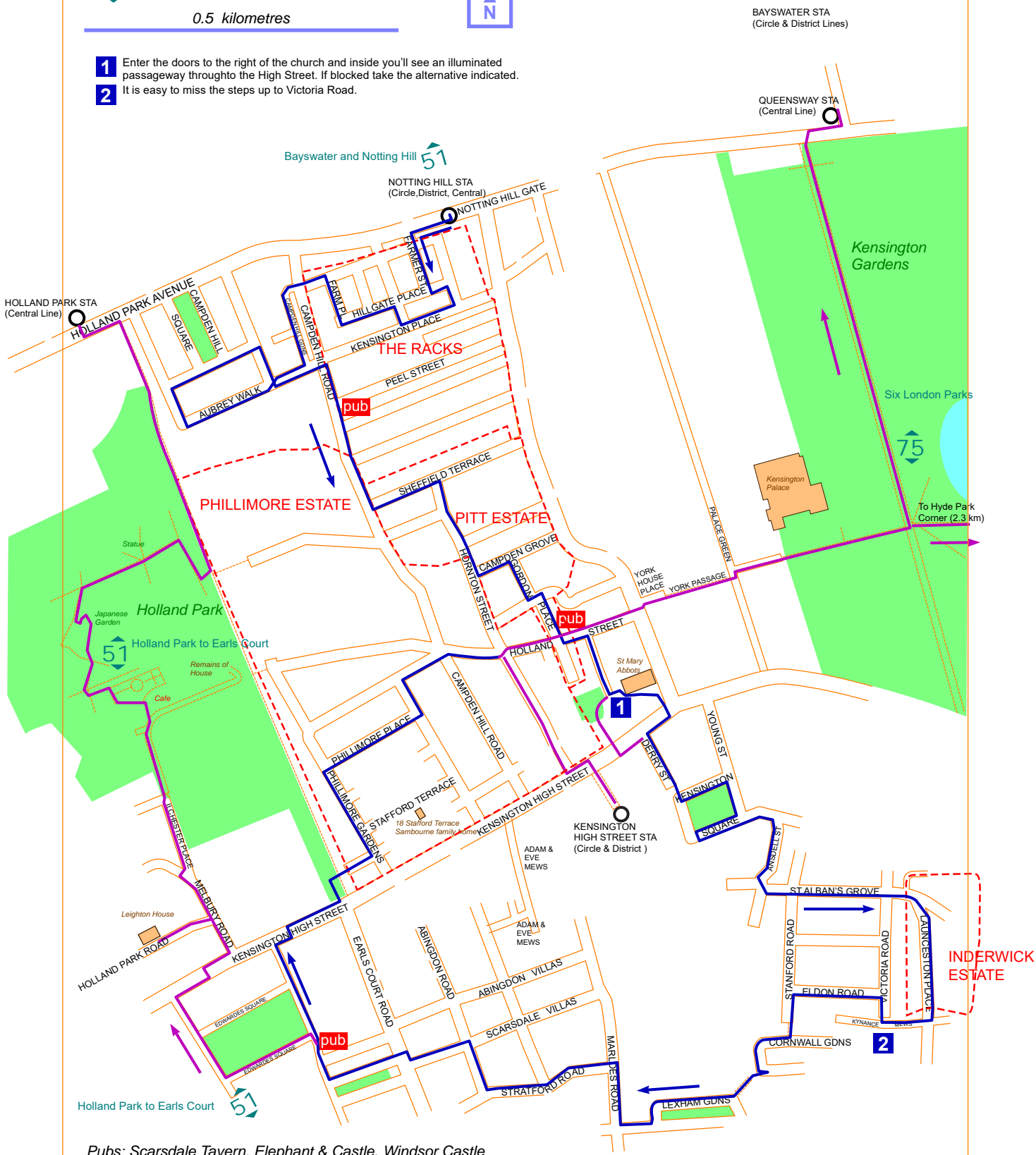


connection with another walk

0.5 kilometres



- 1 Enter the doors to the right of the church and inside you'll see an illuminated passageway through to the High Street. If blocked take the alternative indicated.
- 2 It is easy to miss the steps up to Victoria Road.



Pubs: Scarsdale Tavern, Elephant & Castle, Windsor Castle

walk notes

Kensington Walkabout

This pavement walk starts on the high ground of Campden Hill and meanders down to the High Street and along the borders of South Kensington. There are several ways to end the walk.

Hillgate Village, The Racks

Hillgate Village is the northern part of the area once known as The Racks, part of the Campden House estate. In 1810 it was acquired by John Johnson, a prosperous building contractor, working mainly with stone that he quarried on Dartmoor. In Kensington he used most of his land as a brickfield, while encouraging speculative building around the perimeter. What is now Hillgate Village was constructed in the 1850s, when Johnson's son William began granting a succession of building leases. Since they were first laid out, almost all the streets have been renamed.

One observer in the 1870s described Hillgate Street as "a dingy, ill-favoured slum." The neighbourhood's poor reputation lasted another 100 years but a survey published in 1973, spoke of the remarkable "upward social transformation which has taken place in recent years ... its most obvious outward manifestation being the liberal application of paint in various pastel shades to the brickwork of the houses.

Campden Hill Square, Aubrey House

Our walk takes us up along the ridge to the highest point. The older houses on the north side of Aubrey Walk are studio conversions of or successors to coach houses of Campden Hill Square houses. From the end you can see across to Notting Hill. The core of Aubrey House earlier known as Notting Hill House, is thought to date to 1698. The house was remodelled by Sir Edward Lloyd around 1750. In 1823 the Lloyd family sold land to Joshua Flesher Hanson who developed Campden Hill Square from 1826 onwards. The building plots were sold piecemeal or let, and the lack of uniformity is part of its charm today.

Campden House/Pitt Estate

At Sheffield Terrace we enter and trickle down through what was the Pitt Estate. In 1609 Sir Baptist Hicks, a wealthy mercer and favourite of James 1, became tenant of two closes of land called The Racks and King's Mead. This holding formed the heart of the Campden House estate. In 1616 Hicks purchased some seventy acres to the south and west of his original holding. In 1628 Hicks was created Viscount Campden, deriving his title from the manor in Gloucestershire which he also owned.

The Campden House estate was sold by the family to Laud D'Oyley, whose son broke up the state in 17010, ending up as the Phillimore and Pitt estates. Pitt bought his in 1751 and in 1844 a later Stephen Pitt entered into an agreement to develop practically all of the estate.

Campden House and Little Campden House, narrowly escaped demolition and were left standing with considerably reduced grounds. The area of development was small and of awkward shape, and the street pattern was largely suggested by the presence of already existing roads on the estate, like Pitt Street and Holland Street, and the roads around its edges. The extension of the Metropolitan Railway to Kensington, sanctioned in 1864, cut across the estate from north to south, and although the line was carried in a tunnel several houses had to be demolished for its construction. When rebuilding took place, the new houses erected were often disproportionate in scale. Campden House was destroyed in a fire in 1867.

Kensington History

The Manor of Kensington is mentioned in the Domesday Book as belonging to Aubrey de Vere. A small cluster of homes existed around the medieval church of St Mary Abbot's. The De Vere family retained their manor for nearly 500 years before selling to Sir Walter Cope, whose son-in-law was Henry Rich, Earl of Holland. Altogether there were four manors: Abbots Kensington, Knotting Barns, West Town and Earl's Court.

The arrival of King William and Queen Mary in Kensington in 1689 impacted on population growth. William bought Nottingham House, previously improved by Sir Christopher Wren for the Earl of Nottingham, and converted it into Kensington Palace. Courtiers needed houses close to the Palace and shopkeepers and artisans also arrived to cater for their needs. Kensington's population had 8556 inhabitants living in 1,314 houses.

St Mary Abbot's

Around 1100, Godfrey de Vere (great-uncle of Aubrey, 1st Earl of Oxford), was taken seriously ill and cared for by Faritius, abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary at Abingdon. In gratitude the de Vere family made a bequest to the abbey of 270 acres of land. In 1262 the abbey founded a church and parish in Kensington, dedicated to St Mary. The church was rebuilt three times. The architect George Gilbert Scott was engaged in the current building of 1872. The 85m high spire is impressive.

Kensington Square

The first square to be built was Kensington Square. In 1682 Thomas Young leased land and laid out a new square of 40 terraced houses south of the High Street, which was completed in 1685 and named King's Square after James II. The decision to build a square so far from the centre of London was remarkable and was presumably Young's own and it was not a success, being just too early to benefit from the arrival of the royals.

After 1760 when George III left Kensington Palace, Kensington Square was similarly abandoned by the aristocracy and was largely unoccupied until 1803. The area remained largely surrounded by fields until c.1840 when development accelerated; most of the buildings today round the square were erected, rebuilt or refronted by c.1850. Rebuilding and the addition of stucco have broken up the original homogeneity of the square's architecture. The earliest houses to survive are Nos.11 and 12 in the south-east corner, which were outside the limits of Young's Square and were probably built 1693-1702.

The C20th saw the development of the High Street and its department stores such as Barkers. The square had to fight for its life. To prevent Barkers buying up the remaining freeholds, resident householders entered into a mutual covenant in 1923 binding themselves not to assign their houses to any person or firm for any other purpose than as a private dwelling-house. See London Gardens on line: <http://www.londongardensonline.org.uk/gardens-online-record.asp?ID=KAC088>

It still has a fine garden and despite the lack of uniformity it remains an attractive location.

Kensington New Town

The area covering Victoria Grove, Launceston Place, the west side of Gloucester Road between Kynance Place and Canning Place, and the south side of Canning Place is known as the Inderwick estate. Built up neatly and efficiently between 1837 and 1843, this was the area known as Kensington New Town.

In 1836 John Inderwick, optician and meerscham pipe and snuff box importer, bought the estate for one of his speculative developments. Each street has a distinctive house-type, yet there are elements of uniformity. Stuccoed fronts, minor projections and recessions, unapologetic roofs with deep eaves, roundheaded windows and flat Greco-Italian detailing intimate a designer of some thoughtfulness and ability. See British History on line for original text:

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol42/pp130-150>

Abingdon Villas/Scarsdale Villas

Also copyhold land from Earls Court manor, this area was built up between 1850 and 1864. It is less clear than usual where the chief impulse for development came from. I have not found the origin of the name Scarsdale.

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol42/pp225-238>

Edwardes Square

Development began in 1811, when Lord Kensington entered into an agreement with Louis Changeur for the building of houses on the south side of the High Street, undertaking to grant ninety-nine-year leases as the houses were covered in. The most striking feature of Edwardes Square is the very large size of the central enclosure—slightly over three acres—in relation to the comparatively small houses surrounding it, a decision which was to lead the developer to bankruptcy. The plan shows a range of twenty-five houses (now Earl's Terrace), four square storeys above basements and virtually identical in outward appearance to houses in Montague Street where Changeur had previously been working, facing the High Road but set well back and guarded by a pair of small single-storey lodges at either end. The south side of the square was to be a mews. The garden at the centre of the Square was laid out by P A Sack, who later became Director of the National Botanic Garden at Buenos Aires.

Phillimore Estate

The land north of the High Street acquired by the Phillimore family through marriage in the early eighteenth century, was originally part of the extensive estate attached to Campden House. (See Campden House above)

William Phillimore succeeded to the estate in 1779 and within ten years ventured into the field of speculative building. He began with the high road frontage, where roadside development offered a good hope of success.

Little further development of the estate occurred until 1855 when Charles Phillimore laid out and leased much of the estate to the north of the High Road, for building large houses in small plots. Specimen elevations and plans were attached to the original building agreement, but each builder supplied his own designs, and by the time of the third agreement of 1861 all that was required was that the elevations should be approved by Charles Phillimore. It is not known who designed the general layout. The terraces along the High Street, were subsequently demolished for higher density retail development.