

## Shorter Walks – October 2016 to September 2017



Here is a record of the iU3A Shorter Walks group walks in our second iU3A year - from October 2016 through to September 2017. For more recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

### October 2016

**Parkland Walk and Woodberry Wetlands** — A perfect Autumn morning with blue skies and dry, crisp weather set the scene for our walk from Alexander Palace to the Wetlands. We discovered, as we admired the splendid views across the London skyline, that it was the 80th anniversary to the very day, since the first TV broadcast from the mast above our heads. We continued through both sections of the Parkland Walk with a diversion through Highgate Wood for a coffee break, with the constant accompaniment of brilliant Autumn leaf colours. Then we crossed Finsbury Park and were soon in the Woodberry Wetlands, our feet having scarcely touched a pavement. We ended with lunch (as always) with one of the best views in north London, and the bonus of a spot of birdwatching.



**Colne Valley** — The weather gods were smiling on our walk in Hertfordshire after the previous day's wind and rain. It was a beautiful early Autumn day and we were soon shedding layers of clothing as we headed along the Grand Union Canal from Uxbridge, accompanied by the usual soundtrack of parakeets and distant traffic. We stopped for a break at the Visitor Centre café (as Fran's Tea Shop, idyllically situated beside the water, turned out to be closed on Mondays) then continued past the extensive lakes (actually gravel pits) with reflections of golden trees across the water. A decidedly flat walk —

until the last half-mile up a hill to the Old Orchard for a good lunch with views over the lake and red kites soaring overhead.

### November

**Hampton Court and Bushy Park** — Sixteen walkers enjoyed a chilly but mostly sunny walk across the expanse of Bushy Park through colourful woodland gardens and around the magnificent Baroque water gardens. It was a bit of an Autumnwatch experience, with a mistle thrush (or at least a thrush eating mistletoe berries), Egyptian geese, plenty of deer and the inevitable rose-ringed parakeets. We managed to clash not just our walk date, but also starting point at Vauxhall station, with the Longer Walks group, but succeeded in not taking any of them with us. Our walk ended at Hampton Court Palace, where we avoided the maze and had a well-earned lunch before speeding for the train home to avoid the rush hour.



**Thames Path: Kew to Hammersmith** — Thirteen walkers set off from Kew Gardens station, past the impressive National Archives to the Thames Path, pretty soon realizing we were over-dressed for the suddenly mild temperatures. We followed the Thames past picturesque Strand on the Green, diverting through the surprisingly quiet suburbs of Chiswick to magnificent Chiswick House where we stopped in the gardens for a break. Opinions were divided on the architectural qualities of the award-winning modern café building. We paused in the old churchyard to see Hogarth's tomb and continued to the delightful (and well flood-defended) 18th-century houses of Chiswick Mall. No danger to us, as it was low tide. Finally we passed the impressive homes of Robert Walpole, William Morris and even the theatrical Redgrave family. Then it was lunch in a pub by the river for some and the horrors of Hammersmith traffic to the tube station for the rest.



## December



Our **pre-Christmas walk-and-lunch** started with a leisurely walk from Hampstead Ponds at the southern end of the heath, in mild, cloudy weather. We made our way to Kenwood, stopping to admire huge growths of fungus, then an enormous fallen tree (a legacy of The Hurricane of '87) and, finally, the Henry Moore sculpture. We had time for a coffee-break at the Kenwood café, where one member even popped next-door to pay the Rembrandt a quick visit. It was indeed a leisurely walk. And a very short one (just three and a half miles) but the final long uphill climb, past the well-heeled properties of Fitzroy Park to Highgate, meant we worked up an appetite for

lunch at Strada, where we were impressed by both the food and the service, as well as the Italian pronunciation of our names.

## January

**Chelsea and Battersea Park** — seventeen walkers had bright frosty weather for our Chelsea & Battersea Park walk. We were soon through the busy streets around Sloane Square and into the Royal Hospital grounds, where we had to surreptitiously become two groups, in order to blag our way in, as a maximum group size of ten was enforced. After a coffee break in the cafe, overlooking the gardens, we continued past Christopher Wren's elegant buildings and along the Embankment to explore the charming streets around Cheyne Walk. Once across busy Albert Bridge we enjoyed the peace of Battersea Park and followed a meandering path around the icy lake, to reach the café where some stayed for lunch and the rest made their way across Chelsea Bridge back to Sloane Square.



## February



**Victoria Park & River Lea** — this was a watery walk, past a lake, the Hertford Union canal and the river Lea, and the weather added more water in a fine drizzle for most of the morning, but it was an enjoyable 4.5 miles nevertheless. Two fine cafes as well — the upmarket and busy lakeside Pavilion in Victoria Park for our coffee break (with trendy barrista) and the quieter lunch stop in the grandeur of the Manor House in Springfield Park with sweeping views down across the park to the marina and the marshes. So many houseboats, yet you rarely see the residents, just swans, coots and cormorants.

**Wanstead Park** — after the gloom and drizzle of the day before, we were relieved to be walking under blue skies. It was almost an early Spring day, except when we were walking into the teeth of the east wind, blowing straight off the North Sea. The lakes were sparkling in the watery sun and the bird-life provided added interest: the usual ducks, geese and parakeets, with a statuesque heron, but, sadly, no sign of the kingfisher we'd spotted on the pre-walk. A pity the owner of the splendid 18th century Wanstead Manor had gambled away the family fortune leaving only the temple facade and a ruined grotto for us to admire. But at least the café had fortuitously reopened on the very day of our walk, and with only nine of us in our group, we all managed to get a seat too.



## March



**Regents Canal** — Fourteen walkers set off from Warwick Avenue tube in sunshine and after 10 minutes we were walking along the canal. Following a coffee break at the boathouse cafe in Regent's Park we walked past some amazing mansions and then London Zoo passing close to a pack of prairie dogs running around their enclosure. After Camden Market, we headed towards Kings Cross, past the huge redevelopment of the old yards and the flats being imaginatively built inside the former gas holders. We managed not to lose anyone at the World of Books barge and ended up for a friendly lunch stop at Kings Place.

**Wandle Trail** — Fourteen walkers began the Wandle Trail walk at Earlsfield station in South London in perfect weather. The walk followed the course of the River Wandle, mostly on traffic-free paths, through some industrial areas but also along scenic, leafy stretches with wildlife. The route more or less followed the Wandle, but meandered across parks, tram tracks and occasional busy roads too. We passed historic Merton Abbey Mill where the river still provides the power for the potters' wheels as it once did for William Morris's workshop. Lunch was in the attractive surroundings of Morden Hall Park in the National Trust café, after which we continued on to Mitcham Junction.



## April



**Thames Path** — Eleven walkers had a glorious Spring day for a six mile walk from Richmond to Kingston. We timed it perfectly, just after high tide: the river was beautifully full but our feet didn't get wet in Richmond. We walked on both banks too, thanks to the good old Hammertons Foot Ferry which took us across from Marble Hill House to Petersham meadows in fine style. The obliging ferryman even took a photo (see picture). We continued through the leafiest part of the London Thames, exclaiming at early bluebells and vast amounts of blossom, as well as a glamorous file of Mandarin ducks waddling along the water's edge. After Teddington's weir

we ended with a (mostly) excellent lunch at the riverside Boaters Inn.

**Banstead** — Our bluebell walk in the ancient woodlands of the Surrey Hills lived up to its promise with swathes of richly-coloured bluebells punctuating our route through Banstead Wood. There was a surprisingly remote feel to the walk, despite its proximity to the commuter-belt roads and trains. The lack of rain throughout April meant that we were dry both underfoot and overhead and the bluebells and wood anemones appeared not to have suffered at all. Our diversion to the aptly-named Rambler's Rest with its lovely garden and good lunch was worth the extra half-mile at the end of the walk, although service wasn't the fastest. Even Southern Rail managed not to spoil our day and we were back in London by 3.15pm.



## May



**Blackfriars to Tower Bridge** — This shorter walk was a little different from usual and all ten walkers strolled in quite cool conditions through this iconic landscape. From the just-built Tate Modern extension past The Globe and into Southwark Cathedral for coffee the landscape couldn't be more different. Then we went via Borough Market (not stopping) to the courtyard at Guy's Hospital, which proved new to many on the walk, and continued under the Shard via London Bridge station. We arrived at Tower Bridge in the wind and rain. After a quick detour around St Katherine's Dock, with Gloriana moored alongside, we visited the Tower of London and had lunch just as the sun came out.

**Richmond Park** — Although the azaleas in the Isabella Plantation were past their best, thanks to the heavy rains, and the sun never quite made an appearance, eleven of us enjoyed our walk through Richmond Park and along the Thames Path. We saw plenty of deer (all does strangely, and not a stag in sight) and the inevitable noisy parakeets but, after the recent rain, the park was lush and green. Pembroke Lodge was an attractive lunch-stop with its beautiful gardens, and we admired the expansive views across the Thames over to Windsor, and the 'keyhole' view of St Paul's Cathedral through the telescope on King Henry's Mound, though the effect was rather spoiled by a new building behind the cathedral (Boris to blame for that, apparently).



## June



**Cassiobury Park** — Twelve of us enjoyed a six-mile walk through Cassiobury Park and Whippendell Wood near Watford. We walked through parkland, woodland, a golf course and fields of wheat, ending with a short walk by the Grand Union Canal. We were lucky to have perfect walking weather although it was muddy in places and we were challenged by a large tree which had fallen over our path the previous day in the high winds and rain - following a risk assessment, and being intrepid walkers,

we agreed that we would not let it get in our way and scrambled under the trunk (where there were some problems with rucksacks). We ended our walk with lunch in the sunshine at the café in Cassiobury Park.

**Walk to the Borough** — this was our Islington Giving charity walk. 32 took part - either for the whole 11.5 miles or for just some of it. This walk was open to all iU3A members so we had a mixture from the Longer Walks & Shorter Walks groups and others. Another warm day but we got some good tree cover as we meandered down the Dollis Brook Greenway, into Hampstead Garden Suburb, then Highgate Woods, Queens wood then the Parkland Walk to end at Finsbury Park. A very pleasant walk - and we raised over £410!



## July



**Epping Forest** — Nine hardy Shorter walkers braved the midday sun and 26 degree heat to walk a 7 mile circuit of Epping Forest. Luckily we were mostly in the Forest so avoided the worst of the sun. Hats, sunscreen and lots of fluids were the order of the day. We took in sights such as Queen Elizabeth's hunting lodge and the earthworks of Loughton Camp (from 500BC) and tried to identify some of the huge range of trees. We finished with a delightful lunch at the Butlers Retreat

**Canada Water to Greenwich** — On a fine day we skirted Canada Water and spotted a large turtle. We carried on past Greenland Dock, the oldest dock on the Thames, which used to be the largest commercial dock in the world. It was difficult to believe this as it was so peaceful there, with no one around. We walked along the Thames Path with a couple of detours in land, the highlight of which was the 12th century church of St Nicholas, in Deptford, where the remains of Christopher Marlowe are buried. The gateposts contain two 17th century skull and crossbones carvings, which apparently remind the congregation of the inevitability of death. We stopped for coffee at a lovely old pub en route and then took up the path again into Greenwich. After a leisurely lunch some of us decided to walk through the tunnel under the Thames and returned home from The Isle of Dogs. Everyone seemed to enjoy the walk.



## August



**Barnes Bridge to Putney** — This charming walk for twelve of us started via Barnes High Street and the Olympic Studio café to a stretch of pathway alongside the Barnes Wetland Centre. Reaching the Thames towpath we were pleased not to be among the fours and eights rowing against the tide along this stretch of river flanked by boathouses. Across Putney Bridge, past the lovely 15th century alms houses and the weather was turning breezy but it stayed almost dry for our walk through Bishop's Park and then into Fulham Palace where we spent time in the secret walled garden that is being

beautifully restored. By now the weather was getting unpleasant so we were pleased to take shelter for lunch in the café in the Park. A quick and wet scramble took us back to Putney Bridge Station.

**Chesham Circular** — Despite the cloud cover and intermittent dampness ten Shorter Walkers enjoyed a delightfully rural walk in the rolling Chilterns countryside. We started out from Chesham, at the furthest extent of the Metropolitan line, climbing through farmland with panoramic views, then through extremely muddy woodland to a village pub for our coffee break. Finally we followed the River Chess, one of the Chilterns chalk streams, past the site of a former water mill and watercress beds to return to Chesham for a late lunch.



## September



**Ruislip Woods and Lido** — Four hardy Shorter Walkers did the seven miles Ruislip Lido walk. It was an unexpected fine muggy day. The pace was moderate and we managed to avoid most of the mud and Himalayan Balsam. We managed to navigate the intricate path with little signage. The Lido is still popular with the prom brigade. We had a very enjoyable day.

**Syon Park to Twickenham** — With blue sky and temperature in the 70s F (19+ C), it was more like midsummer than the autumn equinox. We were soon having coffee in Syon Park and then along the Thames towpath, through lovely old Isleworth Town and interesting All Saint's Church. The walk continued for two miles alongside the river where we were grateful for the shade of the trees as we passed the sites of old wharves and the mansions of Marble Hill and Orleans (worth a trip back for a visit) and then to the welcome lunch stop at the Barmy Arms, Twickenham, where we sat outside opposite Eel Pie Island. Three walkers visited the pedestrian island after lunch. A lovely easy walk in glorious weather.

