

A Walk Around Beckenham



A Walk Around Beckenham

This is part of a series of walking trails around towns in the London Borough of Bromley. It has been produced by Bromley Council in consultation with The Beckenham Society and Copers Cope Area Residents Association. The purpose of this booklet is to provide residents and visitors with a taste of the long and distinguished history of Beckenham centering on the High Street. Beckenham is an attractive and highly sought after area of London to live, work and visit. Its rich and long history has helped form a character which is very distinctive from other towns in the London Borough of Bromley.

The centre of Beckenham is its vibrant High Street. For many people Beckenham High Street's historic heritage and proximity of housing still give it a desirable 'village' character with a winding road; parish churches; a village green; a school and pubs. Alongside well known chain stores, it has locally rooted independent shops. There is a wide variety of cafés, restaurants, bars, pubs and a cinema attracting leisure users by day and night. You are invited to take a break from your tour to enjoy a bite to eat or refreshing drink.



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Beckenham has a strong historic heritage and this deserves to be celebrated. Its history can be traced back to Roman times. The line of a Roman road runs through Kelsey Park to the south of the station and Beckenham Place Park to the north.

The modern town of Beckenham was shaped by the railway and a number of prominent families through the ages, starting with the Cator family who moved to the Beckenham area in the late 1700s. Other prominent families include the Hoare, Thornton and Spencers'.

As you walk this trail, you will be following in the foot steps of some well known names associated with Beckenham including children's author Enid Blyton; poet and composer Carey Blyton; entertainer Bob Monkhouse; actor Julie Andrews; singer David Bowie; and former Prime Minister Sir John Major.

This walk is an urban walk with some hills and takes about an hour. An alternative route is provided for people with mobility issues or those with prams at the appropriate location (after Stop 9). We start at Beckenham's main gateway into the town, the railway station in Rectory Road. Welcome to Beckenham.



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1. Beckenham Junction Station



Beckenham Station opened in 1857 and was the terminus of the mid Kent line from London Bridge. There was a turntable at the end of the line. Later the railway became part of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway's (LCDR) London extension. Many original features remain, including parts of the station building and frontage on to Rectory Road. Of particular historic value is the footbridge across platforms 2 and 3.

1 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

Leave the station by the exit on platform 2 and walk south out of the station car park. You will have Beckenham Tramlink station on your right. Beckenham High Street is to your left. Cross this main junction and head towards Beckenham Green directly in front, the distinctive Town Sign on The Green points the way.



2. Beckenham Green

On reaching Beckenham Green you will have the opportunity to look closely at the Town Sign, next to which is a plaque setting out the recent history of The Green and reasons for its formation as the 'Village Green'.

The Green today is the site where two bombs fell in the Second World War. It is the heart of the local community with markets and festivals held throughout the year.

Make your way off the Green on to the High Street.



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3. St. George's Conservation Area



You should note that there are the Mews to the rear of Nos. 18 – 30 High Street which housed stables. The site of 32 – 42 High Street was occupied by St George's Church Hall. The rebuilt hall is now located in Albemarle Road. The most dramatic change to this area has been to the site of 44 – 46 High Street. The original building facing the High Street was a retail unit forming the eastern side of Beckenham Town Hall demolished in the 1990s now a Marks and Spencer food store.

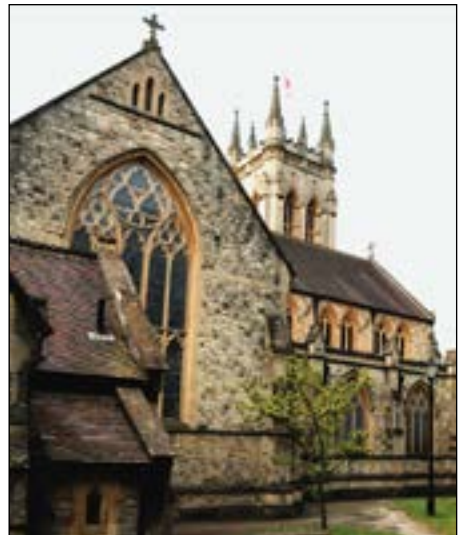
The Mews Alley

Between Mann Estate agents and St Bride's House you will find The Mews serves ground and basement office parking. Much of the property is in Church Commissioner's ownership. Some of the rear buildings were

stables, and the site of St Bride's House was once St George's Church House. This alley is just too big for this project to fix up it will need to be improved by the TfL improvement project.

Staying on Beckenham Green side of the High Street, you can enter St George's churchyard by walking through a small pedestrian gate. St George's church churchyard.

4. St George's Church Churchyard



The pathway leading from the

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entrance gate was made from salvaged gravestones. Old railings and ironwork from around the graveyard was removed during World War II and given to the Government as scrap metal towards the war effort.

Take time to wander around the graves, many of the smaller headstones have not survived but some date back to the 17th Century.

Leave the churchyard through the gate on to St George's Road, turn right and head towards its junction with Bromley Road here you will see. ,

5. Bromley Road Infant School



Bromley Road Infant School on your left was originally built in 1816 as the Bromley Road Schools and extended in 1906. Two of the main features to point out are the copper clad roof vent where the copper has oxidised and is bright green in colour and the plaques at roof level on the Bromley Road elevation.

Turn around to face the High Street. At the junction of Bromley Road and St George's Road area.

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6. The Rawlins Almshouses



These cottages are the Grade II Listed 17th Century Rawlins Almshouses. Look above the centre doorway for the tablet inscribed:

“Anthony Rawlins Esq built these Houses for ye use of ye poor of this Parish of Beckenham Anno Dom. 1694”.

Internally they have been refurbished to modern standards.

7. The Old Manor and Development of Local Government



The buildings on the opposite side of Bromley Road are of great historical significance occupying the site of the Old Manor. Located in the centre of the village, it is probable that this is one of oldest continuously occupied sites in Beckenham.

The Listed Public Hall stands on the site of the earliest wing of the former Old Manor House. This whole area is associated with local governance. The Old Manor House area was altered to form the offices of the Beckenham Local Board, which

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later developed into the Urban District Council. It remained as Council offices until 1932 when the local authority moved to a purpose built Town Hall in Church Avenue on the site of the former village Rectory. Following further substantial alterations in recent times, there is thought to be little, if any material remaining from the pre – 1881 Manor House except the façade of No. 2 Bromley Road.

8. St George's Church and Lychgate



St George's Church and its Lychgate are Grade II Listed. The church is referred to locally as the 'Cathedral of North West Kent'. If you have the time, it is worth taking a break

from your walk to visit inside this church.

It was originally built in the 12th century and survived as a 'village church' until it was rebuilt 1885 – 1887 as a 'town church', by local architect W. Gibbs Bartlett in ragstone and ashlar dressing. The pinnacled southwest tower is a focal point of the High Street and was completed in 1902 sitting as it does atop 'Church Hill'.

The Lychgate is reputed to be the oldest in the country dating back to the 13th century. Tom William Thornton (see Stop 11 below) obtained permission to have it restored at his own expense in 1924 in memory of his two sons who died in World War I. There are two plaques on either side of the central roof beam.

One plaque notes the two young soldiers and the other plaque commemorates the refurbishment of the gate.

The gate is surrounded by some particularly fine yew trees.

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- 2 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

Cross Bromley Road and head south on to the High Street.

9. Milestone



The corner of Bromley Road and the High Street outside the bank is marked by an ancient milestone. The stone was originally located on the opposite corner.

It was repaired and placed here

after being damaged in a traffic accident. It carries the following inscription:

“London Bridge, Miles X 2 furlongs. One mile and half to Shortlands. Croydon Market Place miles IV 6 furlongs Through the Town”. Bromley Market Place miles I, 5 furlongs, the left hand road Wickham to the Swan miles II, 4 furlongs, the right hand road

It was erected in 1713 and restored in 1817, 1887 and 1976.

You have now entered the area known as Church Hill. You need to walk down the hill, over this elevated section of pavement, where you will come to stone stairs. If you have mobility issues, you should cross over at the traffic lights at the junction of High Street and Bromley Road to the opposite side of the High Street.

- 3 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

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10. Old Police Station



1884 saw the construction of the former police station to your left. Many of its original features still remain including signage and the large yard to the rear with gated entrance at the side. When built, it completed the transformation of the former Manor site into a group of 19th Century public and administrative buildings.

4 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

Passing the former police station and down the steps, you are now leaving the St George's conservation area.

Coach Crier Alley

Between 78 High St (Sapore Vero) and 72-74 High St (Boca Social) Historically a Gazebo was once nearby from which a Crier would alert the locals of the return from London of the coach of the Village Squire.

Church Hill Alley

On the opposite side of the road right of 86-90 High St Pierluigi's restaurant you will see the Church Hill Alley Historically this section of the High Street was named Church Hill.

Stable Doors Close

Prior to the redevelopment of Rokewood apartments (between 86-90 Pierluigi's restaurant and 94 Rendez Vous Caffe High Street) the Stable Doors auction rooms occupied this site.

Take time to look across the street at the buildings opposite, particularly the upper floors. You will notice the fine brick detailing and window designs.

Keep walking to the bottom of the hill to the traffic light junction of the High Street, Manor Road and Kelsey

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Park Road. You should make your way to the ornamental gardens diagonally opposite where there is another Town Sign.

11. Thornton's Corner and Surrounds



As you stand at the ornamental gardens, the view up the High Street to St George's Church affords a very pleasant prospect of the Victorian High Street. This section of the High Street was a tree lined lane before the middle of the 19th Century, known as Church Hill.

Opposite the ornamental gardens, the corner parade of shops (Nos. 100 to 110 High Street) is known as Thornton's Corner. Its name honours a prominent local family, the Thorntons, who owned the large stationers shop and library

which occupied this corner for over 70 years. They were also the owners of the former Beckenham Journal newspaper. There is a plaque at first floor level of the parade noting the role of the Thornton family in Beckenham life. The plaque also celebrates the first British Post Office for air mail in 1902.

5 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

Thornton's Alley

Between 96-98 and 100 High Street, from the late 19th century until recent years the stationer T.H. Thornton was located on this corner of the High Street, therefore it is known locally as Thornton's Corner.

Turning to face the ornamental gardens, the road to your left is Kelsey Park Road which leads to an important local park.

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12. Kelsey Park



The park we know and enjoy today was opened almost 100 years ago in 1913, but its' history can be traced back as far as the 12th Century when the Kelsey area was owned by the Lord of the Manor of Beckenham.

It is popularly believed that the beginnings of the Kelsey Estate originate from 1408 when William Kelsiulle was granted a lease of two meadows where he built a house close to the lower waterfall.

In 1472 William Brograve took over the estate, which remained in his family for the next 200 years until 1688 when it passed into the Burrell family. William Brograve made various improvements during his tenure including the addition of an Oratory or Chapel in 1479 after being granted

a licence by the Bishop of Rochester.

Four generations of the Burrell family lived there over the following 130 years until it passed briefly to Edward Gross Smith in 1820 and then on to the Hoare family in 1835. The estate had undergone extensive landscaping during this period (reportedly by the well known designer Repton) and stretched out over more than 3,000 acres as far as Elmers End. The upper lake mansion house was also constructed then. However, the first mansion had fallen into disuse by the turn of the 19th Century and was demolished, as there was no mention of it in the sale papers in 1820.

The Hoare family were the owners from 1835 until 1909 (Hoare banking family). During this time they made a number of improvements to the estate, including building two lodges, a cottage hospital, fire station and a chapel.

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After Charles Hoare (3rd generation) inherited the estate he set up stagecoach services between Beckenham and Sevenoaks and enjoyed driving the horses himself. He was a good cricketer (like his father before him) and with HG Wells' father as coach was selected to play for Kent. By the mid-1890s Charles had lost interest in the estate and leased it out as a convent. Upon his death in 1909 Kelsey was sold.

The original intention was to build a prestigious gated housing estate, but the owner of the Beckenham Journal, Tom Thornton, ran a successful campaign for Beckenham Council to buy the estate. They purchased 21 acres and set up the park. The Opening Ceremony took place on 31 May 1913.

After leaving the park walk further along the left hand side of the High Street, the next significant location is the Christ Church complex of buildings.

13. Christ Church



This church's main building and related halls is located off the High Street in Fairfield Road. The foundation stone of the church was laid on 3 April 1875 and the site was consecrated in May 1876. During World War I Christ Church halls were used as a military hospital.

On 5 January 1945, a flying bomb fell on the community of Lea Road and Burnhill Road, killing twelve, making many homeless, and causing damage to the Church. Exactly five years later on 5 January 1950 the restoration of the church was completed.

In 2001 Christ Church celebrated 125 years of serving the community.

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- 6 You will find a information plaque on the pavement of Fairfield Road,.

Keep walking back along the left hand side of the High Street.

14. The George Inn



The period of greatest growth and change in Beckenham, from 1860 to 1939, has radically altered this section of the High Street.

Old photographs show the road lined with timber framed and weatherboarded houses, typical of a Kentish village. With one exception, these have all been replaced with newer buildings. The only reminder The proprietor of The George with his customers

show off the old jug, late 1880s of the past is 'Ye Old George Inn'. A Grade II Listed building, this fine brick and weatherboard inn has seen few major external changes. The Inn is thought to date from the 1600s.

- 7 You will find a pavement information plaque here.



The proprietor of The George with his customers show off the old jug, late 1880s

Keep walking along the left hand side of the High Street.

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15. Kelsey Square Conservation Area



Kelsey Square is an intimate group of Listed red brick ornamental Kelsey estate workers cottages, located on a prominent corner of the High Street. Originally constructed for Peter Hoare of Kelsey Manor, it also formed the setting for the principle entrance to the mansion, Kelsey Manor, and a lodge is recorded here from 1840.

Kelsey Lodge, distinct from the smaller cottages, is thought to have been constructed in 1864.

To the south in Burnhill Road, another Grade II Listed building is the 18th Century Coach and Horses Inn with stables behind.

Walk back into the High Street

8 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

16. Old Fire Station



Facing the High Street on the entrance to Burnhill Road, the building fronting the High Street, number 153, is Beckenham's Old Fire Station, the upper floors of which housed the Offices of the local Board, before it moved to the Old Manor site. Note the 19th Century water pump on the corner, the water would have

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gushed from a spout set in the lion's mouth. You will also notice the recently added plaque installed by Copers Cope Area Residents' Association. To your left on the High Street, the new housing development next to the Old Fire Station contained a cottage (demolished in 1936) that was the town's Police Station until 1885, when the police also moved to the Old Manor site which we saw earlier

17. Zizzi Restaurant



The site of Zizzi restaurant was the Three Tuns Inn. This is an attractive half timbered public house which was built in 1902. The pub has a history as a local music venue in the 1960s and 1970s. Famously David Bowie performed at the pub in 1975. A plaque on the wall and the Flash on the pavement commemorates this event.



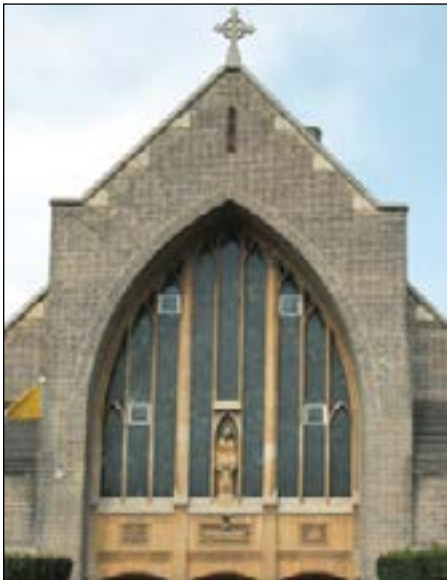
- 9 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

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As you walk further down the High Street away from the Kelsey Square Conservation Area you will notice that the style and feel of the High Street changes, the Victorian and Edwardian buildings start to give way to 1920s and 1930s styles and you come to Village Way.

Turn into village way.

18. St Edmund of Canterbury Roman Catholic Church



This is a striking 1930s building with its massive tower and

adjoining Parish house close to the junction of the High Street. Standing outside the main entrance you will see between each door and the window a stone fascia with relief carvings, the central one depicting St Edmund of Canterbury's tomb.

10 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

Back on to the High Street, you will see the Art Deco 1920/ 30s style parades, particularly when you look at the upper levels of the buildings on north side.

Blyton Place

This is the bit in front of lidl
The entrance to LIDL used to be occupied by United Dairies milk plant has been named in recognition of Beckenham residents author Enid Blyton and her nephew composer Carey Blyton. It is hoped the TFL public realm improvement project will use the space to celebrate their work.

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Pavilion Parade

The entrance to Sainsbury's is adjacent to first the site of the first cinema in Beckenham, 'Pavilion Cinema' (opened 1914) and 'Ancient Lights' sign in the wall opposite.

19. Daylight and Views



The High Street and this part of Beckenham is intermingled with more modern buildings, such as the Sainsbury's supermarket which is set back from the High Street. Walking into this square, see if you can spot the "Ancient Lights" sign. (It's located at first floor level on the eastern flank wall). This sign refers to ancient light rights under English Common Law to landowners, where owners of adjoining land cannot obscure these rights for example by erecting a building too close.

Continuing along the High Street heading west, at footpath level, you will notice the inscription at the base of pilasters at Nos. 187 – 189. These refer to the sons of the famous Burton the tailor.

Ironmonger's Passage

225-231 and 233-235 The High Street there is a short entranceway to offices. Only historic connection found is that the village forge was located nearby.

Burton Passage

Between 189-195 and 199-203 the High Street, this alley is adjacent to the large building to the west erected for Burton Menswear.

Burrell Alley

Actually called Burton Yard, by Nandos see attached

This alley leads to Burrell Passage and was is adjacent and behind a large building erected for Burton Menswear in 1930's. Two inscribed shop-front pilasters still remain.

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You are now coming to the end of the High Street. Before you leave the town centre, you should see Dean's Garage just around the corner at No. 439 Croydon Road. Whilst the occupiers and use have changed a little, the original shop front still remains.

20. 225 – 231 High Street



A set of buildings of interest are 225 – 231 High Street. You can see that the building has a modern shopfront to the ground floor; it is the upper floors which are of interest. These

upper floors are in red brick with blue engineering brick diaper work decoration and banding. The detailing is very similar, not only to the buildings in Kelsey Square but also to the former Kelsey Park Farm and Beckenham Hospital façade in Croydon Road. This 'house style' suggests the work of the same architect/ builder and possibly has some link to the owner of the entire road – Peter Hoare of Kelsey Manor.

12 You will find a pavement information plaque here.

Walking back up the High Street you now have a choice of completing your walk either by taking a detour along The Drive and Church Avenue or remaining in the High Street.

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21. War Memorial



You are now at the end of the High Street and should walk around the roundabout which is marked by Beckenham's War Memorial. The memorial is of Portland stone and is located within its own garden. The memorial is 7.5 metres in height, taking the form of a stylised Celtic cross emblazoned with St George and the Dragon in high relief. This landmark is Grade II Listed and was designed by Newbury A Trent, English sculptor. The Memorial becomes the focus of Remembrance Day, led by the British Legion with the community groups gathering at the War Memorial in November each year.

11 You will find a pavement information plaque on the island here.

22. Cinema



Still used as a cinema, this building was formerly the Regal Cinema and Ballroom which opened in 1930 and contained a café and restaurant. With its Art Deco design, this striking building along with the War Memorial outside physically mark the start of High Street and the commercial centre of Beckenham distinguishing it from the more residential areas of housing.

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As you walk on this north side pavement of the High Street you have the opportunity to look across the street to the following point of interest.

Regal Alley

Between 272 and 276 you will see the alleyway to Odeon Cinema car park. Originally the 1930's Art Deco cinema was called the Regal and was built on a field used as the village's fairground.

23. The Drive and Church Avenue



The first left hand turn along the High Street is The Drive. This is a typical quiet residential road in Beckenham. Famous people who lived in The Drive include the partly blind Dai Davies who was awarded the Albert Medal

for stopping a bank robbery; the composers Carey Blyton; Enid's brother - Hanly Blyton; Dr Wesley Carr – Dean of Westminster Abbey; and Arthur Carr – Chief of Staff of the Salvation Army.

Part way along this road you will come to a bridge over the River Beck. The river runs mainly in a culvert, but between Nos. 73 and 75 The Drive you can see its progress as it flows from Kelsey Park. Take a right hand turn into Church Avenue. Walking along this road will take you past a car park. This was the site of the former Beckenham Town Hall demolished in 1990s. Turning left at the traffic lights you will be lead back to Beckenham Junction Station.

If you decide not to divert, but keeping along the High Street there are a number of places of interest.

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24. The High Street



Nos. 162 – 166 High Street was originally built as a J Sainsbury Store in 1906. You will also note that ground floor shop fronts follow the bend in the road but the upper floors are set back slightly to avoid having to do so.

The High Street is a busy thoroughfare and in places narrow. This means that as you have walked down one side of the street, you have missed opportunities to consider views across the road. Following this route means you can pop into the variety of shops and places to eat and drink.

Retrace your steps along the High Street to return to Beckenham Junction Station, check out some of these alleyways on the way.

Gordon Alley

By Cancer Research, to the west of this alley there was once a large 19th century villa - Gordon House. It was demolished for the present building that was Sainsbury's first store in Beckenham, opened in 1915.

Leather Alley

Between 182 and 184 the High Street To the south of this alley was Brawn's a merchant all types of leather goods, with Beckenham Boot Works at the rear.

Wood House Alley

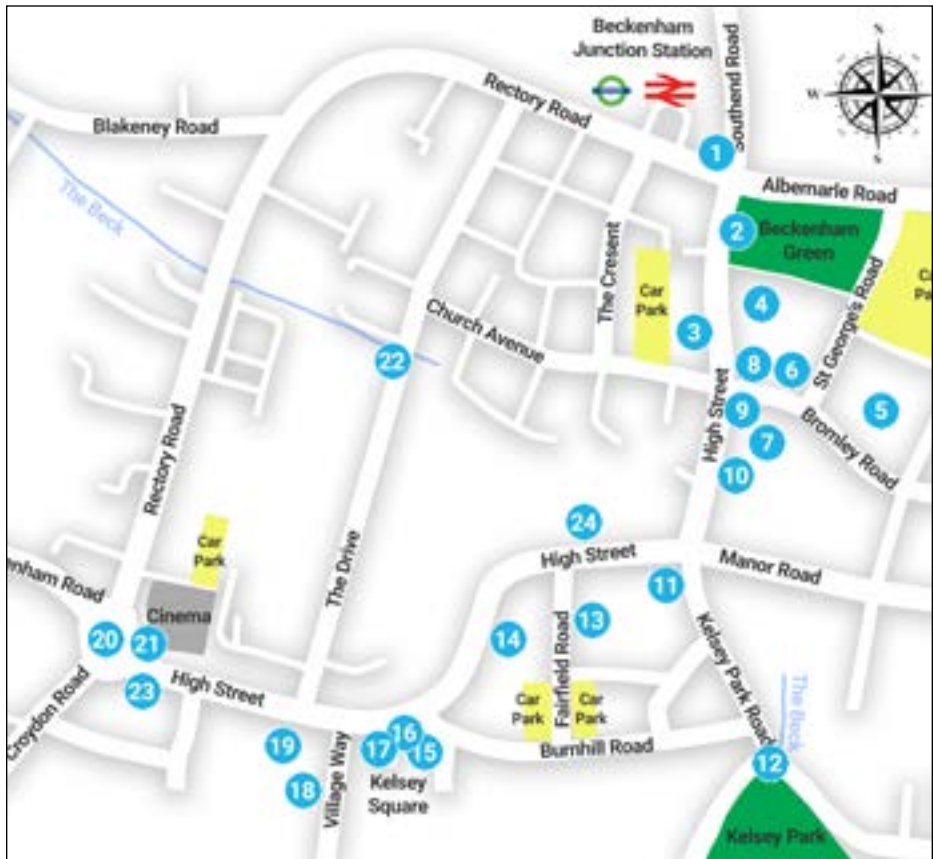
On the opposite side of the road - W.H. Smith and its neighbour are only two storeys high, this may be connected with the fact that it is the site of the 'Old Wood House' which had an entrance to Padbury wheel works (circa 1904) where this alley is today.

Legion Alley

On the other side of the High Street between 158 and 160

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25. Map of Brass Pavement Plaques



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26. Heritage Trail



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- 1. Beckenham Junction Station** Opened 1857 as the terminus of the Mid-Kent Railway from London Bridge. Used by Charles Darwin on journeys between London and his home at Downe.
- 2. St George's Church** Built 1885-7 on site of a pre-12th century church. The 13th century Lych Gate is thought to be the oldest in England. Adjacent are the Rawlins Almshouses, originally built 1694.
- 3. Site of Manor House** A Lord of the Manor's house stood here from the 12th century until 1882. The Beckenham Local Board used the building until 1932. Only the facade remains, with a new building behind. The Public Hall was built in 1883 in Arts and Crafts style.
- 4. Former Police Station** This was the police station from 1885 to 2007. Now converted to commercial use and flats.
- 5. Thornton's Corner** A local stationer's family traded here for over 70 years, and published the former Beckenham Journal newspaper.
- 6. Christ Church** Built 1876-1901 with halls and a schoolhouse. The halls were used as a military hospital during the First World War.
- 7. The George Inn** Built mid-17th century it is the oldest building in the High Street. It was a stopping place for the London to Dover horse - drawn stagecoach.
- 8. Kelsey Square** This was a group of 19th century workers' cottages at the entrance to the former Kelsey Estate, with a fire station on the corner. Note the water pump on the side wall. At the rear is the historic Coach and Horses public house.
- 9. Former Three Tuns** Built 1902 as a public house until early 21st century. Famous in late 1960's as venue of David Bowie's Beckenham Arts Lab. The village police station was adjacent to the left.
- 10. St. Edmund of Canterbury Church** This Neo-Gothic style building opened in 1938 to the rear of the demolished Pavilion Cinema (1914-1933) on the High Street.
- 11. War Memorial** A 7.5 metres high stylised Celtic cross of Portland stone emblazoned with St. George and the Dragon in high relief. It was unveiled in 1921.
- 12. Odeon Cinema** This Art Deco style building, originally named the Regal, with a ballroom and restaurant, was opened in 1930. Since then the cinema has had various name changes, before conversion to the Odeon with a multi-screen cinema in 2001

This guide is available as a download from

www.beckenhamhighstreet.co.uk/walk-around-beckenham/

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The Beckenham Society members of:

The Beckenham Society

Copers Cope Area Residents Association www.coperscope.org.uk

West Beckenham Residents Association www.westbeckenhamra.org

Beckenham Business Association [www.](http://www.beckenhambusinessassociation.co.uk)

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