

## **HAMPTON COURT PALACE TO KINGSTON BRIDGE** **The Royal Palace and the Barge Walk**

Meet up with the Thames Path beside the handsome, rippling river at Hampton Court Palace, whose magnificent buildings combine imposing survivals of Henry VIII's Tudor palace with the palace created for William & Mary by Sir Christopher Wren. Enjoy free access to its facilities and parts of the grounds before setting off beside its long, mellow brick wall where ornamental railings by French blacksmith Jean Tijou treat passers-by to sudden, stunning views of extravagant formal gardens. As the willows and anglers of the far bank give way to the boats and houses of Thames Ditton Island, the path enters the green swathe of the Barge Walk, making a left-hand sweep around Hampton Court's Home Park and Golf Course. The gravel walk now has a wilder, unkempt look, passing peacefully amongst tall grasses and overarching branches, with trees and shrubs at the water's edge. That's Thames Ditton on the south bank, with its Victorian water works just visible in the urban jumble behind the Thames Marina. Still rounding the Home Park, the rustic path opens out to view boats of the Thames Sailing Club and the little island of Raven's Ait and beyond that, an Italianate tower catches the eye. This is St Raphael's Church, built as a private chapel by local landowner Alexander Raphael in 1848. Now tarmac takes over from the country path and the river completes its curve to show off the graceful arches of Kingston Bridge, faced with yellow-grey Portland stone. Mature trees shade the run up to the bridge with swans, geese and houseboats very much at home on the water's edge. To continue the walk to Teddington Lock on the south bank, take the slope up to the bridge and cross at the lights. Go over the bridge and down the steps in front of the lift, emerging on the waterfront beside the John Lewis building.

## **TEDDINGTON LOCK TO RICHMOND BRIDGE Twickenham and Marble Hill House**

Arriving at Teddington Lock via the south bank walk, take the footbridge over the River Thames – enjoying a bird's eye view of the lock and weir. The Thames Path takes you straight ahead up Ferry Road, past the Tide End Cottage pub, to turn right at the crossroads into residential Manor Road. Take a brief detour at this junction to visit the Landmark Art Centre, in the cathedral-like church to your left. Manor Road soon becomes Twickenham Road, which in turn becomes Strawberry Vale. Horace Walpole's Gothic extravaganza Strawberry Hill House, now part of St Mary's College, is tucked away here down Waldegrave Road. Radnor Garden marks a welcome reunion with the Thames, with riverside seats well placed to enjoy the view. The war memorial here is specially sited to be seen from Richmond's Royal Star & Garter Home providing a focal point on Ham House Avenue, which links Twickenham visually with Richmond Hill. Beneath the school across the way are the remains of Alexander Pope's subterranean grotto, once decorated in shells, crystal and semi-precious stones, dug beneath the road to link his villa with its riverside garden. On leaving the park, bear right at the traffic lights into Cross Deep and immediately right again down Wharf Lane, to the tree-lined Embankment with its footbridge to Eel Pie Island, detouring perhaps to the little shops in Church Lane. Pause on entering Riverside to visit St Mary's Church where Pope is buried in the nave (although his skull is said to have been exhumed) and take a peek at the riverside gardens belonging to 17th-century York House, now used by the local council: a door in the garden wall reveals an exuberant Italian fountain adorned by Venus and attendant nymphs. Walk on then along the lane beneath the footbridge of York House, past charming houses clustered round the White Swan and under another footbridge to Orleans House Gallery, Richmond's principle art gallery with the Octagon Room designed by James Gibbs. Cross the green here to the rural river path, passing the ferry to Ham House just

before the entrance to Marble Hill House, the Palladian villa built for Henrietta Howard, mistress of George II. Now Richmond's Royal Star & Garter Home rises majestically from a belt of trees and the path clears Glover's Island to reveal the full width of the river, with glorious views of Petersham Meadows at the foot of Richmond Hill. A final stretch of wilderness brings the path past flats and houses to Richmond Bridge.

## **RICHMOND BRIDGE TO KEW BRIDGE** **Old Isleworth and Syon Park**

Walking on from Richmond, cross at the lights on Richmond Bridge and set off straight ahead down Willowby Road and the pleasant footpath of Ducks Walk, regaining the river at Twickenham Bridge. Ten minutes into the walk, the tree-lined embankment of Ranelagh Drive arrives at pretty Richmond footbridge, where lock and sluices help control the level of the Thames. Here the path joins the River Crane Walk to skirt a cosy huddle of houseboats before branching left into a short lane then right onto the main Richmond Road. Follow the high brick wall past the entrance of Nazareth House Convent, turning right along Lion Wharf Road to the waterfront, with pleasant views of Isleworth Ait. From here, the Thames Path will either be signed straight ahead or via its temporary route round the Town Wharf pub and along Church Street. Both emerge on the picturesque waterfront of Old Isleworth, where the artist J.M.W. Turner lived and painted at Sion Ferry House. Passing the London Apprentice and the new church with the old tower (survivor of an arson attack) walk round the corner and into 200-acre Syon Park, the Duke of Northumberland's historic London home. Walk up the grassy approach past Syon House, with its Robert Adam interiors, through the car park and turn right onto Brentford High Street. Once across the Grand Union Canal, turn right into The Ham, take the steps to the right immediately after the railway bridge and cross the canal. Turn sharp left down to the towpath, past the houseboats, and cross the lock

to regain the High Street via cobbled Dock Road. After the second traffic lights, take the gate in the wall of Smith Hill to walk behind the Watermans Art Centre and into Watermans Park. Look over the river here to Kew Gardens or beyond the High Street to the tower of Kew Bridge Steam Museum, where awesome beam engines pumped London's water supply from the Thames. At the main road, cross back to the Musical Museum in its modern new home near the church next to the hotel, or turn sharp right down The Hollows. The steps descend to a secluded, narrow stretch of towpath, home to a secret community of hidden houseboats, each with its own little bridge and gate. From here, Kew Bridge is just minutes away.

### **KINGSTON BRIDGE TO TEDDINGTON LOCK Restful Vistas and Working Locks**

Reaching the river via steps at the southern end of Kingston Bridge, walk past John Lewis, behind Turks Pier and under the railway bridge into Canbury Gardens, Kingston's Victorian pleasure gardens, complete with bandstand, riverside seats and Boaters Inn pub. With a leafy, rural vista opening up ahead, follow the waterside to take the raised pavement looking down over Lower Ham Road, where the serene river is lapping at the curb. Veer left then onto the gravel path and into a silent and secluded world with drowsy looking dwellings on the far bank and nothing to disturb the rustle of grasses here beside the path. From here, emerge to the full splendour of Teddington Weir and Lock, the largest of the river's locks, which connects the tidal and non-tidal Thames. The weir regulates the flow of water to an average 178 million gallons a day, working alongside the lock complex that includes an enormous barge lock, skiff lock, launch lock and boat rollers, still with the original lock office. Two footbridges added in 1888 – 89 meet on the immaculate little island, enabling walkers to cross to Teddington's nearby pubs and toilets, with the choice now of following the Thames Path into

central London on either bank. Stay on this side to watch boats working the lock or to stop for home-made refreshments at the Lockside Café, open (weather permitting) from Easter to September.

### **TEDDINGTON LOCK TO RICHMOND BRIDGE Ham House and Richmond Hill**

Broad and gravelly, the Thames Path plunges on above the sloping river bank, with tide-washed willows and birdsong conjuring up the magic of a walk through a leafy country estate. This green woodland haven is Ham Lands nature reserve, created on gravel pits in-filled with rubble from London's wartime bombsites. As paths disappear inland amongst the trees, the Thames Path marches on beside a river busy with rowers, to cross the entrance of the huge lagoon that forms the Thames Young Mariners Base. Now the Gothic summerhouse of Radnor Gardens comes into view on the far bank, followed round the curve in the river by Eel Pie Island and the jetty of the Richmond Boat Yacht Club. Suddenly, the skyline seem taken up by the commanding Royal Star & Garter Home, the home for disabled ex-servicemen and women established in 1916 in the old Star & Garter Hotel. Almost at once, the path opens out to the entrance of Ham House (10), an outstanding survival of a 17th-century Stuart house and its contents, which in its heyday was a hotbed of court intrigue. Here at its boundary is the stage for the ferry to Marble Hill House and beyond that, Ham Polo Club, which welcomes match spectators. Five minutes' walking produces the classic view of cattle grazing in Petersham Meadows, rising steeply to Richmond Hill. The Thames Path skirts the meadows wall to enter Riverside Park. Richmond Bridge is ahead, but look back along the river: there's not a single building in sight. Now walk on through the park, turning left onto Petersham Road for timed tours of the Royal British Legion Poppy Factory (11), which turns out 32 million poppies and 80,000 wreaths every year. Keep beside the river as it passes the

Richmond Canoe Club, restaurants, cafés and bars to walk under the arch of the bridge and into the sociable buzz of historic Richmond waterfront.

### **RICHMOND BRIDGE TO KEW BRIDGE Royal Richmond and Kew Gardens**

Bistros, bric-a-brac shops and pubs cluster here beside the river, where shallow steps lead up to the Information Centre in the Old Town Hall. From the White Cross pub to the railway bridge at Old Palace Lane, the path is crossing the frontage of Tudor Richmond Palace, once the showplace of the kingdom. Look right as you go along Cholmondeley Walk to glimpse the portico of the Trumpeters' House of 1701 (adorned with statues of trumpeters taken from the Palace) and the gardens of 18th-century Asgill House, built on the site of the old palace brewhouse. At Twickenham Bridge, yards from Old Palace Lane, the vista opens up into the Crown Estate's Old Deer Park Recreation Ground, where George III established an Observatory on the old Kew Meridian, the line of which is marked by three obelisks. Ahead are the elegant green and cream arches of Richmond footbridge, where sluices are lowered to help regulate Thames tides, and round another curve the far end of Isleworth Ait reveals a sudden, lovely view of Old Isleworth with its slipway, church and pub. From here a long green tunnel of overarching trees and wet woodlands gives way to views of Brentford's Syon Park, with the proud lion on the parapet of the Duke of Northumberland's Syon House. The path is now skirting the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (12), the largest living plant collection in the world and a World Heritage Site. Beyond the mouth of the River Brent and Grand Union Canal, which links the Thames to Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol, the tower of Kew Bridge Steam Museum comes into view, while here on the right is Kew Palace (13), the former home of George III newly restored to its 18th-century splendour. Walk on from here past the Herbarium and Library to the side entrance to the gardens and just stay with the river to Kew Bridge.