

Preface to the 2020 edition

These walking notes around the centre of Ealing were originally compiled by John Foster White in 1970 (based partly on the research notes of the late H G D Holt held in Ealing Library). In 1976 he updated his notes to reflect the rapidly changing face of Ealing as it entered the last quarter of the 20th Century, and again in 1986. These original notes are available on the Ealing Civic website.

The notes were again updated by Ealing Civic Society in 2016, when they were used as the basis of a Civic Day guided walk and also provided to Historic England who made them available on an app covering several areas of London. Sadly, that app is no longer available, so the Society has again updated the walk and provides this version as a two-part self-guided walk.

John Foster White had long standing connections with Ealing and the Civic Society. He was remembered by Joy Anthony – herself one of the original members of the Society's Executive Committee – as someone “who seemed to know every church in the country, and its history”. She also remembers him as being “very witty”. He was well known in the literary world as a director of the publishers MacDonald & Co. and was, for example, closely associated with the success of the work of the author Catherine Cookson. He contributed an epilogue to her 1986 pictorial memoir Catherine Cookson Country, a quote from which was used in an obituary for the author in the Independent when she died in 1998.

The notes start with a brief history of Ealing, from Saxon times through to the Victorian railway age and onwards to its current status as the London Borough of Ealing. The walk itself starts at Haven Green, moving northwards up Haven Lane and eventually to the top of Castlebar Hill via Brentham Garden Estate. Additional notes on St Peter's Church, on the corner of Mount Park Road, are provided by the Reverend Richard Hayes, vicar of St Peter's from 1982 to 1991. The walk then takes participants south again, past Ealing Abbey to the Town Hall and Christ the Saviour Church on New Broadway, before heading down through Walpole Park, onto Ealing Green and finally to St Mary's Church in South Ealing.

The original author ended with a fitting quote from John Betjeman, with the hope that...

“... some of you have been able in the course of our progress through the Queen of the Suburbs to:

... Regain your boyhood feeling

Of uninvaded calm:

For there the leafy avenues

Of lime and chestnut mix'd

Do widely wind, by art designed,

The costly houses 'twixt.”

Ealing Civic Society in its turn hopes that these notes will once again be of interest to Ealing residents, whether those who recognise the Ealing of 40 or 50 years ago, or as newer arrivals who would like to know more about our local history and heritage.

Acknowledgements: original text by John Foster White, updated (2009) by Greg Birdseye; further updated by Robert Gurd and Paul Fitzmaurice with illustrations by Historic England (2017); slightly revised and updated version by Ann Chapman (2020). © Ealing Civic Society 2020

Introduction (1986)

Ealing is one of the ancient parishes of Middlesex and its origins Saxon or even earlier. Considering its “genteel” image during the past century, there is some irony in the most likely derivation of its name being from the people of Gilla (one with a loud voice) with Yelling as one of its recorded medieval spellings. For a long time it was called Great Ealing, as distinct from the nearby hamlet of Little Ealing (still identifiable south of the present Northfields Station).

The modern centre is the stretch of the London-Uxbridge road known successively as The Mall, The Broadway, New Broadway and more recently the award winning Ealing Broadway Centre, designed by Keith Scott of Building Design Partnership. The old village (conservation area) lies to the south and extends approximately from Ealing Green to the Parish Church, on the road to Middlesex's somewhat woebegone county town of Brentford.

Ealing, like many another Middlesex parish, was already developing by the 16th Century as a centre for market gardening and dairy produce to supply the needs of an expanding metropolis 6 miles to the east. In the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries it became increasingly a place of fashionable residence: agreeably rural but conveniently near to town.

Amongst the worthies who lived here at various times were the Princess Amelia (at Gunnersbury, later a Rothschild property, now a museum); Queen Victoria's father, the Duke of Kent (at Castle Hill Lodge: we pass the site on Castle Bar Hill); Henry Fielding and, later, Lady Byron (at Fordhook, which stood NW of Ealing Common Station); Spencer Perceval, the Prime Minister assassinated in 1812 (at Elm Grove – its site, SW of Ealing Common marked approximately by the Perceval Memorial Church, All Saints, by W A Pite 1903-5). More recently, the site has been marked by a Civic Society green plaque.

Successful private schools were established, the most famous being Great Ealing School (1698-1908) whose famous pupils included Cardinal Newman, W M Thackeray, Captain Marryat, R Westmacott and W S Gilbert. Both the future King Louis Philippe of France and T H Huxley's father were assistant masters there; and Huxley himself was born in Ealing in 1825. And so indeed, on 8th August 1876, was Charles Hamilton, better remembered as Frank Richards and the creator of Billy Bunter – also marked by a plaque, in the Ealing Broadway Centre.

The suburban growth of Ealing really began, however, after the coming of Brunel's Great Western Railway in 1833. The old village spread northwards to meet the trains. From the 1870s (and especially after the arrival on July 1st 1879, of the District Railway with a commuter line right through to the City) growth was even more rapid, and Ealing swarmed affluently up to the northern ridge of Castle Bar and Hanger Hill.

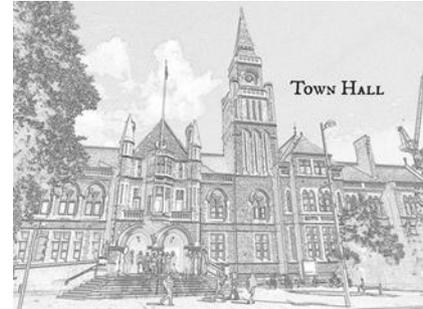
In 1801 the population was 2,500, but when Ealing became an Urban District in 1894 it was 30,000. In 1901 Ealing was the first Middlesex town to be incorporated as a Borough. By 1911 the population was 61,000 and by 1965 it had reached 183,000. At this point the Middlesex Borough became a London Borough, and as this brought within its boundaries the former neighbouring Boroughs of Acton and Southall, the total population of Municipal Ealing is now over 300,000.

It was during those last decades of the 19th Century that Ealing came to be known as the “Queen of the Suburbs”, a description still used in the Official Guide in the 1940s. With two World Wars and a changing social scene, it has gradually ceased to be the retreat of retirees from the Indian Colonial Service and other colonial administrators. Their children and grandchildren have followed the usual pattern of moving further out (or in), but it remains inherently respectable and is still possessed of considerable charm and a creditable degree of local awareness as reflected in the work of the Ealing Civic Society and many other local associations. In 1976, it was noted that property values are reckoned among the highest throughout suburban London, and that remains the case in 2020 with the anticipated coming of Crossrail.

Our walk starts in Longfield Avenue in the heart of Victorian Municipal Ealing (see map at end). The **OLD FIRE STATION (1)** (1888, enlarged 1900-01) was designed by Charles Jones, Ealing's first Borough Architect, Engineer and Surveyor. He was responsible for many buildings in Ealing and is much admired locally. The building is now part of the recent Dickens Yard development and has been used as a sales office and now a retail unit.



Reaching the end of Longfield Avenue, turn to the left into New Broadway and you will face the **TOWN HALL (2)**, another building designed by Charles Jones (1888). This Grade II listed building is built in the neo-Gothic style in Kentish ragstone, with a blended eastern Gothic extension by Prynne and Johnstone, dating from 1931. A more recent and separate brick extension is largely (and mercifully) concealed from view. The original building included a Hall (the Victoria Hall) funded by public subscription and opened in 1889 by the Prince and Princess of Wales to commemorate Queen Victoria's 50th anniversary.



The Council is currently (2020) in the process of implementing a proposal to dispose of the Town Hall on a lease to a boutique hotel developer which would see the rear extension demolished and replaced with a modern replacement, the western end being mainly hotel uses and just part of the eastern end retained for limited Civic uses. This proposal has been the subject of challenge by the community in respect of disposal of the publicly funded Victoria Hall.

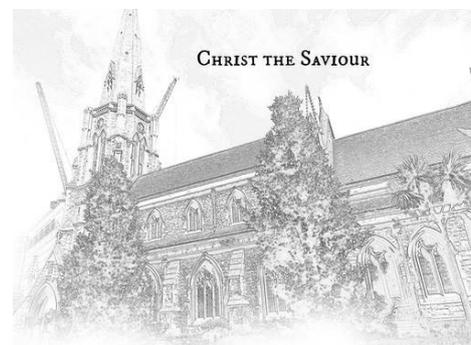
We now cross New Broadway to the site of what was originally the **FORUM CINEMA (3)** (1934), built to the designs of John Stanley Beard seating 2,175 patrons. Beard was also the architect for a second Ealing cinema, the Walpole Picture House (formerly in Bond Street), The Forum's opening film was Ealing Studio's *Love, Life & Laughter* starring Gracie Fields. The classical style of the frontage was a deliberate reaction to the modernistic style often associated with Odeon cinemas of the period. The first floor area above the entrance was originally an ABC café. The Compton cinema organ was removed in 1962 to Wormwood Scrubs prison where it remains. After being run by a number of different operators, the cinema closed in September 2008 and in 2009 was largely demolished for redevelopment, leaving only the dismal façade you now see. This is currently being incorporated into the new Filmworks development but as a retail unit rather than a new cinema; that will be located in Bond Street round the corner.



The Forum Cinema in 1934

Now look east towards Ealing's central landmark, the church of the first new parish to be created here since ancient times and today a stronghold of the Anglo-Catholic tradition, **CHRIST THE SAVIOUR (4)**.

Grade II listed Christ the Saviour was built in 1852 and designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott (known for St Pancras station and hotel, Durham Cathedral and many many more), in Kentish rag with Bath stone facing and pinnacles, built (as Christ Church) at the expense of Miss Rosa Lewis (who died at Castle Hill House in 1862), daughter of William Thomas – "gentleman" – Lewis, the actor, for long associated with Covent Garden Theatre. Pevsner calls it "ambitious and dull, of correct late Early English style", but local writers are understandably more enthusiastic. (Scott is said to have

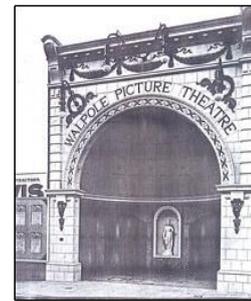


found his inspiration in Adderbury, Oxon.) In 1903-8 the interior was reconstituted and decorated by architect G F Bodley. During the blitz in 1944, a flying bomb caused serious blast damage, but restoration began in 1948, and in 1951 came reunion with the daughter parish of St Saviour (church in The Grove by Fellowes Prynne, and a war casualty except for the Grade II listed Clergy House) when the present dedication was adopted. Bodley's work includes a fine organ case as well as screens and the pulpit. East and Lady Chapel windows are by Hugh Easton (1952). In the churchyard, there is a memorial cross to a former vicar by Oldrid Scott (c 1895). There is a modern church hall attached to the north side of the church which blends well and received a special commendation in the Ealing Civic Society Annual Awards Scheme in 2002.

From here one may contemplate the contribution made to Ealing's Victorian townscape by the lofty Christ the Saviour steeple, the Town Hall spirelet, and further to the east the spire of the former Methodist Church by John Tarring and Chas Jones (1868-9), this last acquired and restored by Ealing's large Polish Catholic community.

Note also across New Broadway the part glass-canopied parade of shops by Frederick Hall Jones (c1905), son of the redoubtable Charles Jones. There is more work by him on the east side of Bond Street, into which we now turn, but here the canopies are long gone.

At the top of Ealing Green – the old village green – turn right into pleasant tree lined Mattock Lane. Pass the emerging Filmworks development on the right to where the fascia of the demolished **WALPOLE PICTURE THEATRE (5)** (formerly in Bond Street) has been somewhat bleakly reassembled and fixed to the side wall of the first house as a now rare specimen of Early Cinema (1912). One benefit of the new development is that this fascia will be restored and displayed in a more prominent position within the public realm.



Walpole Cinema, Bond Street

(Fascia may be inaccessible due to construction work.)

Then move on to the **QUESTORS THEATRE (6)** (Norman Bransom 1963-4, with later additions to the foyer etc.), much of it built by the members of this celebrated amateur theatre club under professional supervision.

The theatre was founded in Ealing in 1929 and has since grown to become Europe's largest community theatre. It moved into a disused Roman Catholic 'Iron Church' (church or chapel made from corrugated iron) and the adjacent Victorian Mattock Lodge in 1933 after the death of Father Richard O'Halloran who had founded the original Roman Catholic Church in Ealing.

It was agreed that the Questors should have a new purpose built state of the art flexible '3-D' theatre in the 1950s designed by Norman Branson ARIBA who was also a designer, actor and director at the Questors. It was opened in the presence of the Queen Mother in 1964 and was described by theatre director Sir Peter Hall as 'one of the most exciting laboratory theatres in the country'.



Now cross Mattock Lane to go into **WALPOLE PARK (7)** whose preservation we again owe largely to Charles Jones and where his memorial plaque has been fittingly re-erected. Born in Beccles, the son of a leather merchant, he trained as an architect, came to Ealing in 1856, built up a considerable private practice, and then in 1863 became surveyor to the newly formed Local Board. He immediately provided Ealing with the first proper drainage system in the Thames Valley, despite protests over the expense, and so he went on through the decades with lighting, roads, public buildings, open spaces et al, becoming known as "The Man at the Wheel" and with an extraordinary capacity for getting his way with the Council. He even found time to write a book about Ealing, which strongly reflects his exuberant and even overwhelming personality.

In 1913 he was still hard at work when the by now Borough Council designated him as the next mayor, but he died before he could take office. The whole town went into mourning and hundreds followed his funeral procession to Hanwell Cemetery. The inscription on his memorial may be borrowed from the tomb of a far greater architect Sir Christopher Wren, but is still richly deserved in

terms of much that is best – more than one hundred years on – in the Ealing he loved and served so well. *Si monumentum requires, circumspice* – If you seek his monument, look around.

Walpole Park is listed at Grade II and was recently restored with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The great feature of Walpole Park, and Ealing's most noted secular building, is the house often misleadingly known as **PITZHANGER MANOR (8)**. The main block is unmistakably by Sir John Soane, who lived here intermittently c1802-10, but the south wing survives from an earlier house from 1770 by George Dance the Younger. Last occupied as a private residence by the youngest daughter of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval who died in 1900 at the great age of 95, and provided in her will for the building of All Saints church as a memorial to her assassinated father, the house together with a north wing added in 1940



then served as Ealing's Central Public Library until 1985 when the library moved to the then new town centre precinct. The north wing was converted into an art gallery in 1995. In 2019, Pitzhanger Manor House and Gallery reopened after a comprehensive restoration project, which has returned the principal rooms to their original Soane splendour, removed the Victorian infill to expose the magnificent north front of the house and upgraded the gallery so that it may mount major exhibitions.

Return now to Ealing Green which tapers into St Mary's Road, following the line of the old village from which a variety of Georgian early 19th Century houses happily survives – heading south past the Grade II listed **Thorpe Lodge, Pine Cottage, Morgan House, Wrexham Lodge and Willow House (9)**. On the opposite side of the road lies another Charles Jones creation, the Congregational (now Methodist) Church and manse (1859).

Beyond Willow House, to the south and west lie the famous **EALING STUDIOS (10)**. The oldest surviving film studios in the country, they started in 1902 when film producer and director Will Barker built greenhouses in the garden of West Lodge to provide optimum conditions for filming. The present Grade II listed sound stages were built in 1932 when Basil Dean of Associated Talking Pictures became head and stars such as George Formby and Gracie Fields began their film careers. The heyday of the studios was from 1938 under Sir Michael Balcon



when many distinguished war films and later the world famous Ealing Comedies were produced. From 1955 to 1990 it became the BBC film unit. After a gap of nearly 50 years film production began again in 2001 with the production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The complex continues to thrive, now also housing a number of film related businesses and a film school.

To the south and leading east is **THE PARK (11)**, laid out by S Smirke in 1846, with its large Italianate paired villas, listed at Grade II, in particular numbers 21 and 22 with their rather grand towers.

Continuing southwards on the east side of St Mary's Road, an old vicarage wall hides an undistinguished YMCA hostel and this is followed by the large University of West London, originally Ealing Art College (Stillman, 1953).

The final stop on our walk, where the road bends, is **EALING PARISH CHURCH (St Mary) (12)**. Old Ealing church collapsed in 1725 and was replaced by a Georgian "brick box". This was not nearly grand enough for burgeoning Victorian Ealing, and in 1866 S S Teulon set about transforming it into what Archbishop Tait described as "a Constantinopolitan basilica". He did so with gusto, retaining the nave walls but adding a chancel and then a western tower (1874).



St Mary's Church interior (1909)

The galleried interior was restored and considerably brightened by H S Goodhart-Rendel in 1955 and restored again to its original colour scheme in 2004 (recognised by a Civic Society design award). There are several older monuments inside, and John Horne Tooke – politician and philologist (1736-1812) - is buried in the churchyard. The church is listed at Grade II.

