



Sands End: A Walk from Wandsworth Bridge to the Imperial Gasworks

Sands End, the area between Wandsworth Bridge Road and the overland railway, was the most rural corner of Fulham. Residents were few as the land was marshy and suitable only for grazing. During the 1890s it was gradually developed and by 1900, the waterside fields had been replaced by “a region of poverty and squalor”. By the time of the publication of the 1916 ordnance survey, it was a fully developed industrial area: delivery of raw materials could come by river, encouraging the development of storage facilities and industry. Sixty years ago, the area was still a thriving industrial centre with an enormous gas works and power station, a petrol depot and numerous other factories and works but by the late 1970s it had become an industrial wasteland: the power station unused, the gas holders deflated or demolished and the factories empty. Today, you will find new residential developments and a large number of building sites.

The walk starts at Wandsworth Bridge.

The steel cantilevered **Wandsworth Bridge** was opened in 1940 and designed by Sir Thomas Pierson Frank who had it painted in dull shades of blue as camouflage against air raids, a colour scheme still seen today. Although it's one of the busiest Thames crossings it has been described architecturally as "probably the least noteworthy bridge in London". It replaced a toll bridge built in 1873 that was commercially unsuccessful and too narrow and too weak to carry buses so was demolished in 1937.



It is not possible to walk along the towpath here as the Albert, Comely and Swedish Wharfs are working wharfs. Take Townmead Road and note the facade of Fulham Wharf which housed **Kops Brewery** where they made nonalcoholic beer from 1890 when the temperance movement was gaining momentum to 1917 when it became a margarine factory.

Pause at the mini roundabout by Sainsbury's. The whole area in front, between Townmead Road and the river would have been the site of **Fulham Power Station**. The first was built in 1901, a second added in 1936 with a river frontage and four chimneys. Britain's electricity supply industry was nationalised in 1948 and it became part of CEGB. Decommissioned in 1978, the area is now riverside flats, a storage building and the Harbour Club.



Take the river path. In the past barges brought coal up the river as shown in the photograph and cranes on **Fulham jetty** would move it on to a conveyor belt to be sent to the power station to produce electricity. The disused jetty is supposedly going to provide the local community with an ecological education centre together with a bio-diverse wildlife reserve – but for the moment, it is being used as a marketing centre.

Pass Regent on the River (1999), then **Imperial Park**, Fulham's most recent park.



The 260 acre site located between the Kings Road and the River Thames was a former industrial area until 20 years ago. Property developers, St George, started building Imperial Wharf in 2004, its name commemorating the Imperial Gas Company set up in 1824 which covered almost all the land to the north. Since then there have been many other residential developments in the area - Chelsea Creek, Chelsea Waterfront, Chelsea Island - but this was the first and the largest.



Walk under the railway to **Chelsea Harbour** with its recognisable Belvedere Tower and famous Design Centre. It was built on the site of Chelsea Basin and a Victorian railway coaling dock. When planning permission was granted in April 1986, the whole site was derelict and full of contaminated materials which had to be excavated and disposed of before any construction could take place.

Detour left to see the **Marina** but return to the river to walk and go as far as the corner of Chelsea Creek (historically known as Counters Creek) below the sky scrapers of Chelsea Waterfront.

Chelsea Creek forms the boundary between Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington & Chelsea and has probably been a boundary marker since the Saxon period. Culverted to take the West London Line along its course, it continues north, going under the Westway, through Little Wormwood Scrubs and then through Kensal Green Cemetery.

Leave the towpath here and follow the creek to the left. Looking back you will see the tall skyscraper of **Chelsea Waterfront** (presently the tallest in Fulham) on the Fulham side and the **Lots Road Power Station** on the Chelsea side. Opened in 1905 and shut in 2002, it was in its time, the largest power station in the world, powering most of the London Underground.



Here, you can walk direct to the Kings Road along Lots Road or you can take a longer route by the old gasworks. To do the latter, go round the Design Centre and cross back under the railway by Imperial Wharf station.

Turn right, keeping to the creek/lock as far as possible and go through what would have been the southern section of the gasworks, now the residential **Chelsea Creek**.



The **Imperial Gas Company** began producing gas here in 1829. By the middle of the 19th century Imperial was London's leading gas company. A merger in 1876 created the even larger Gas Light and Coke Company, which continued to gobble up Sands End. The works stretched from Michael Road to the river, Imperial Road to the railway. The northern section is now being developed as **Kings Reach**. It is a building site so you have to walk round it and along Imperial Road.

Turn right at Emden Street and you will see a plan of the development. Follow the road round and you reach **Imperial Square**. This square was built by the company in 1868 to house workers employed at the gasworks.

Walk through the passageway on the far side to Harwood Terrace, turn right to Michael Road and go to the end. Take the footpath. **Sandford Manor** is almost completely hidden behind tall walls on the left. It is a Grade II* listed house probably built in the late 17th century (with later additions) and is reputed to have been a residence of Nell Gwynne, mistress of Charles II. Follow the passage north to the Kings Road where you will emerge just before Stanley Bridge which carries the Kings Road over the West London railway.

Here you will find buses or cross the road and walk straight ahead and you will reach the Fulham Road and Fulham Broadway Station.