



**Walk the war-torn streets of Newington; blitzed by bombs, divided by ramparts, but the scene of victories for social support.**

### 1 The Cuming Museum

This treasure trove was designed to be a 'British Museum in miniature'. It opened in 1906 as a specially built extension onto the public library, to show off the collections of Henry Syer Cuming (1817-1902). The first phase of the museum's existence was ended when it was bombed in 1941, and it was not reopened until 1959. Sadly the museum suffered another major fire in 2013, and is still undergoing restoration work. The surviving objects have been moved to other locations.

### 2 Stead and Browning Street – 'The War on Want'

This area was part of the Robert Browning Settlement, a religious organisation that was dedicated to improving the lives of the poor. It provided free meals and legal advice, social and education activities, paid for trips to the seaside for poor children, and had a popular 'Goose Club' to save up for a goose at Christmas. At the end of the street is Herbert Morrison House, which was the Browning Club. This provided an alternative to the bars and taverns of the area, serving only coffee.

Herbert Stead was a social reformer and campaigner who started the battle for a state pension. He wrote: "Respectable, sober, honest, hard-working men and women... find themselves destitute in old age. They are flung aside as worthless."

After 10 years campaigning and holding meetings in these streets, the first Old Age Pensions of five shillings were given to people over 70 in 1909.

### 3 Faraday Gardens – Octavia Hill

If you stood here in the mid 1800s, you would have been in the midst of squalid, overcrowded slums. The campaigning force of Octavia Hill swept through here in the early 1900s, transforming 22 acres into 600 homes for the poor. Her philosophy was that the needy should

not only have good housing for reasonable rents, but a nice place to live, with encouragement to work and be self-reliant. She was particularly adamant about the need to have gardens and open spaces, and when she persuaded the owners of this land to redevelop it, she also managed to secure these gardens as a park.

### 4 St Peter's Church

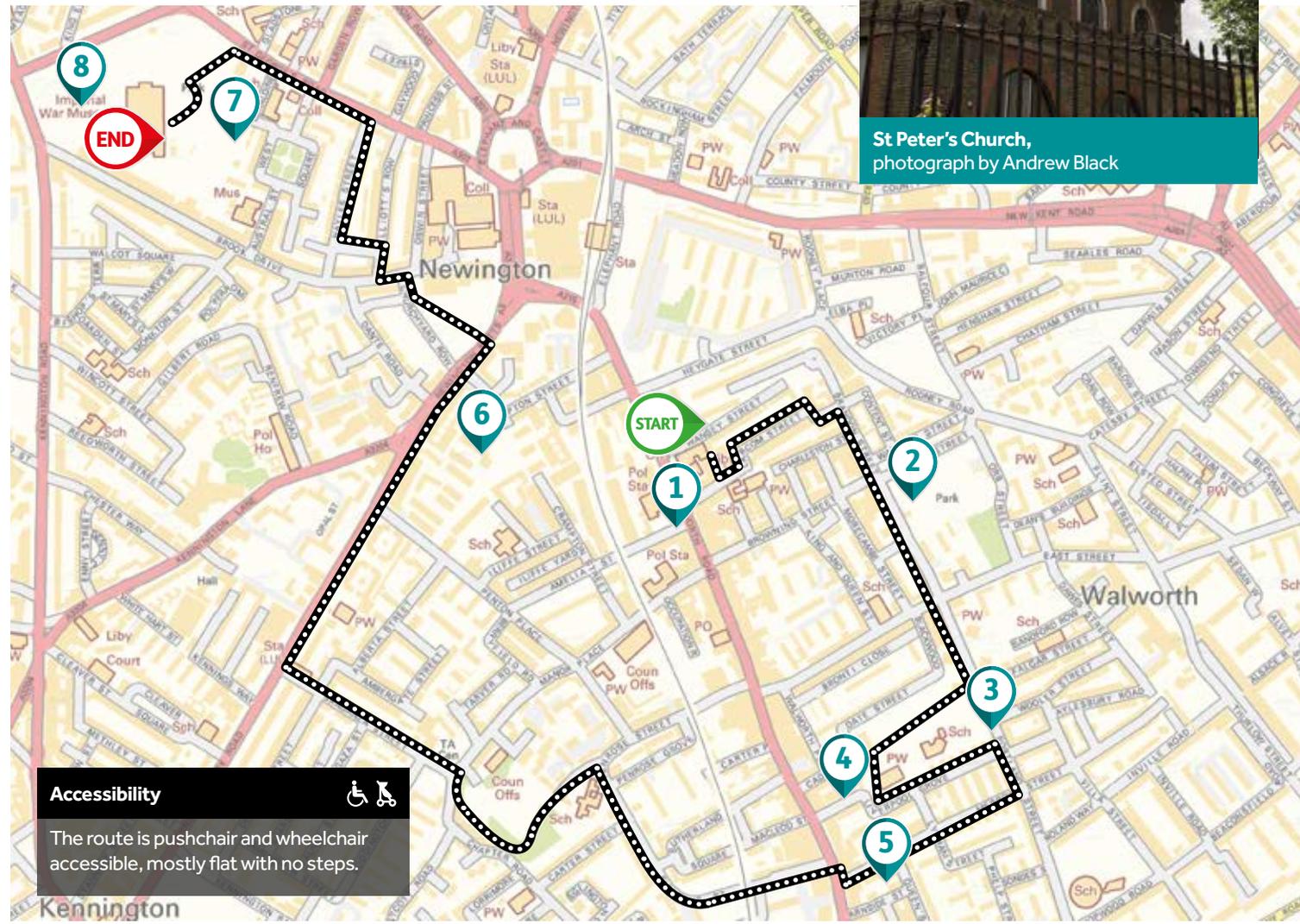
During WWII, there were relatively few air raid shelters in Walworth, and those that were available were overcrowded and unpleasant to sleep in. The crypt of St Peter's seemed the

ideal alternative, and on the evening of the 29th of October 1940 over 900 people crowded in.

Then tragedy struck; three high explosive bombs came straight through the building and exploded in the packed crypt. At least 100 people were killed immediately and many more were seriously injured. In fact it was a miracle that the floor of the church did not collapse as well. When the church was inspected by engineers the reason for this became clear – the arches continued below ground to form a complete circle of brickwork.



St Peter's Church, photograph by Andrew Black



**Accessibility**  
The route is pushchair and wheelchair accessible, mostly flat with no steps.



**Octavia Hill Houses, Portland Street,**  
photograph by Robert Larkin-Frost

When the bombs detonated, the entire building jumped into the air and re-settled onto its foundations with surprisingly little damage.

**5 Merrow Street – Records Office**  
Another victim of WWII bombing was the Records Office that used to stand at the end of this street. Nothing was ever seen going in or out, and the rumour is that it held top secret paperwork from WWI. When it was hit by an oil bomb in 1940 the whole building went up in smoke, and large pieces of partly burned paper from its vaults rained down on nearby streets. One large piece had the words ‘SS Egypt’; referring to a ship sunk in WWI that was said to carry a huge amount of gold.

**6 Kennington Park Road – Guinness Trust buildings**  
These imposing buildings represent another scheme to help with affordable housing before the invention of the welfare state. Established in 1890 by the great-grandson of the Guinness brewery founders, the Trust is still going strong and owns over 60,000 homes in Ireland and the south of England. These were the first government-funded Trust buildings.

**7 Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park – St. George’s Fields and Berlin Wall**  
A large area of land just past the north edge of the park used to be known as St. George’s Fields; quite marshy and poor to build on but close to London, it was the site of Southwark Fair in the 1700s, and some of the most dramatic political demonstrations of the age. The most serious were the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots in 1780, when around 40,000



**Guinness Trust Flats,**  
photograph by Ishwar Maharaj

marched from here to Parliament and attacked MPs, as well as prisons and the Bank of England. The army were called in and given orders to fire upon groups of four or more. About 285 people were shot dead, with another 200 wounded.

In what is now the forecourt of the Imperial War Museum (founded during WWI and moved here in the 1960s) a section of the Berlin Wall can be found. The colourful side of the wall was on the west, whereas the reverse side – facing east – is dull grey and forbidding. The wall physically divided the city for 28 years from 1961 to 1989 and came to symbolise the ideological divisions between east and west during the Cold War.

**8 St. George’s Fields – Checkpoint Charles I**  
During the English Civil War of 1642-1651, King Charles I fled the capital, leaving it to his opponents, the Parliamentarians. In



**Imperial War Museum Berlin Wall,**  
photograph by Robert Larkin-Frost

1643 they began to build defences against attack extending some 11 miles (18km) around the city. Up to 20,000 men, women and children worked as volunteers to build what became known as the Line of Communication, which was the largest in Europe at the time.

The defences were mainly a strong rampart made of earth, reinforced with a series of 23 fortifications. One of these was in St. George’s Fields, and was still visible in 1724 when Daniel Defoe wrote about the moat and the fort “so undemolish’d still, that a very little matter would repair and perfect them again.”