

# Art, Literature and Green Spaces Walk



See the explosion of art around Bellenden Road, the site of William Blake's vision on Peckham Rye, a public garden given a famous facelift, and places featured in Muriel Spark's novella The Ballad of Peckham Rye.

## 1 Peckham Library

This surprising building was designed by Will Alsop and won the Stirling Award in 2000 for architectural innovation. The main reading rooms have been elevated to separate them from the noise of the street. Inside there are 'pods' which have meeting rooms and spaces for children. The library has a wide collection of books by black writers.

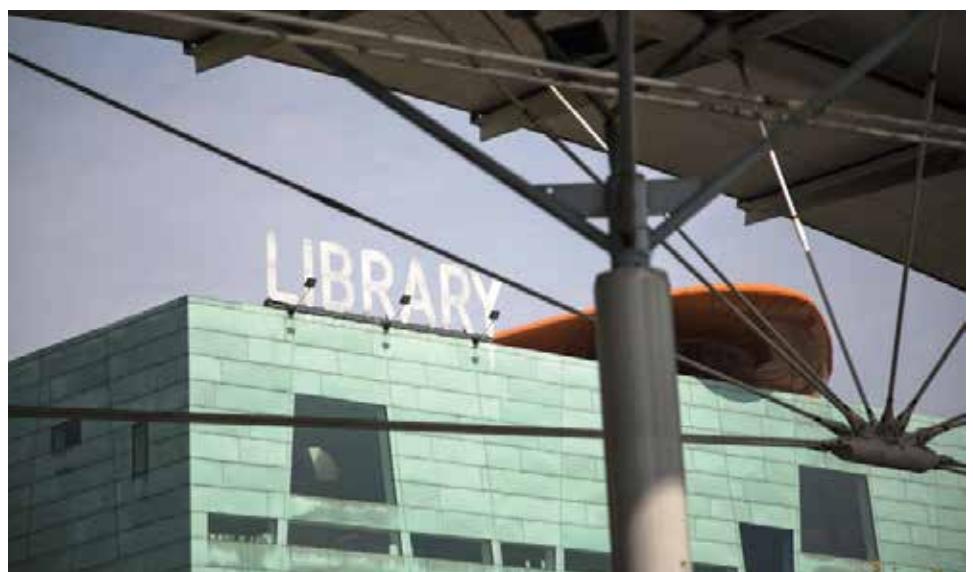


Choumert Square,  
photograph by Uschi Klein

## 2 Bellenden Road

As you walk along this road you may notice something of a French 'flavour'. This is because a large group of French Huguenots (Protestant Christians) settled here after fleeing persecution in the early 1700s. Today it is also popular with artists such as Antony Gormley, creator of Angel of the North, who has a studio here. He has added to the unique nature of the road by designing some of the cast iron bollards, nicknamed the penis, the

egg, the peg and the snowman. The exploding book relief poking through the window at no. 210 is by influential post-war sculptor John Latham. Now known as Flat Time House, the artist declared it to be a 'living sculpture' in 2003, and it now serves as a gallery and learning space for his work.

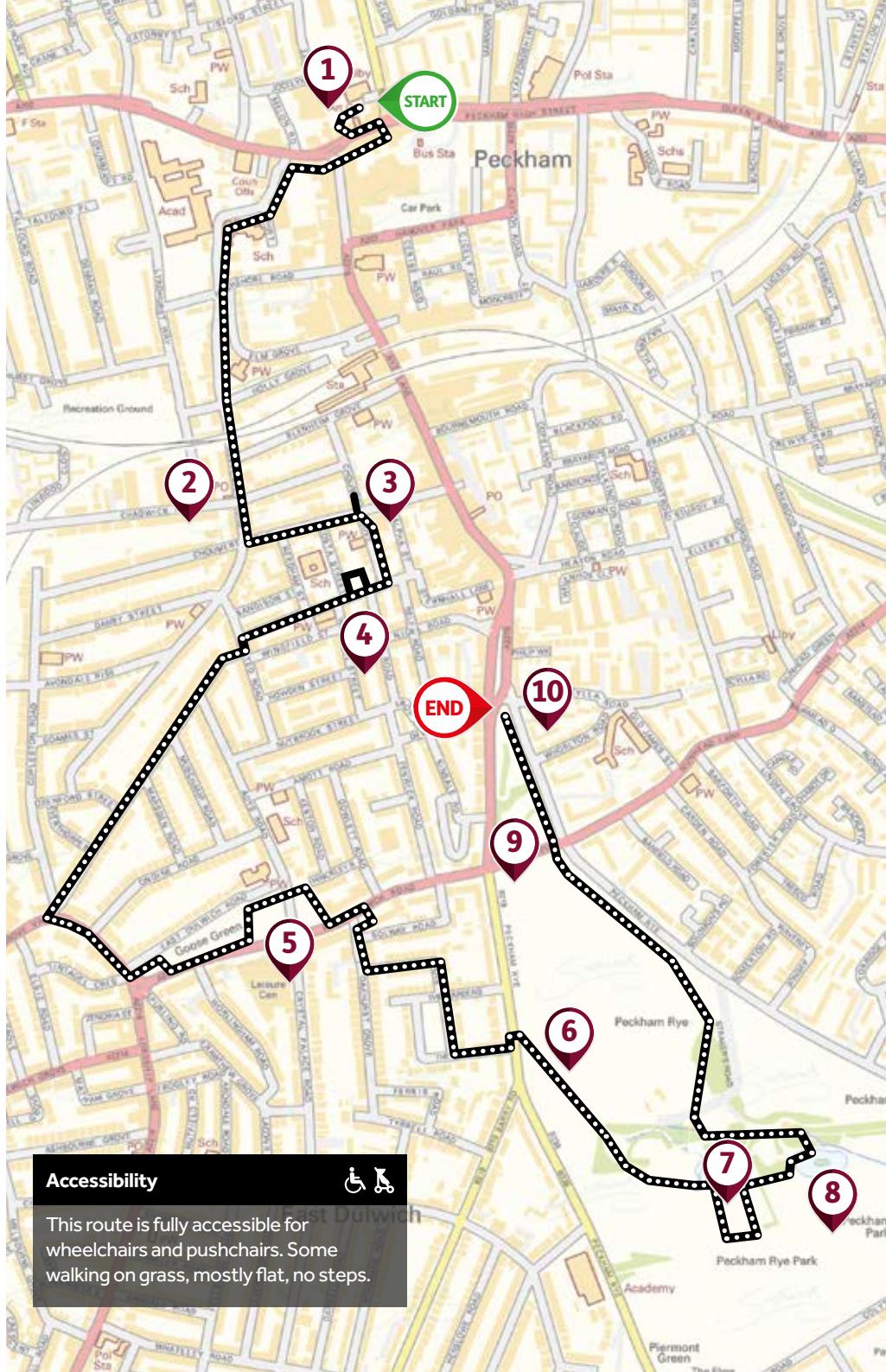


Peckham Library, photograph by Uschi Klein



Peckham Rye  
SE15 3UA

Peckham Library  
SE15 5JR



## Accessibility

This route is fully accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Some walking on grass, mostly flat, no steps.





**Goose Green – William Blake Mural**  
photograph by Uschi Klein

### 3 Choumert Square

This is actually a walkway, but at the end is a private garden which was originally the toilet and laundry area for the cottages. Rumour has it that it was once also a brothel. Now a gentrified area, it has become a communal space for all the residents, maintained by them together. Once a year the Square opens for people to look around.

### 4 McDermott Community Gardens

The entrance to these gardens is just off Costa Street, opposite the school. They were given a facelift in 2000 by Charlie Dimmock, as part of her show 'Charlie's Garden Army'. Previously an unsightly dumping ground, the team landscaped and drew on local artistic

talent to install beautiful mosaics, a copper water feature and the lovely iron gates.

### 5 Goose Green – William Blake Mural

William Blake was a groundbreaking poet and artist of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Revolutionary, reactionary and fairly unrecognised in his lifetime, he moved in the same circles as Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, William Wordsworth et al. Throughout his life he claimed to see visions, the first of which was here in Peckham Rye as a young boy. Looking up into the branches of an oak, he saw "a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." The original tree has now gone but in 2011 the Blake Society planted a sapling at the supposed spot of Blake's vision.

The 1990s also saw a revival of interest in Blake, and artist Stan Peskett was commissioned to paint a mural at Goose Green, in honour of Blake's 235th birthday. Titled 'A Vision of Angels', it was painted with the assistance of local care groups and schools, and was unveiled in 1993.

### 6 Peckham Rye Park

For centuries Peckham Rye Common was used as a deer park, although local people had rights to graze their animals here too.

The Common was opened as a park in 1894, and a major part of the site was set aside for sports together with an American Garden, an Arboretum, and an Old English Garden. To the south is the Japanese Garden. The main feature is a water garden with an arched stone bridge. The park was used as a prisoner of war camp in World War II and in 1994 the park celebrated its centenary.



**Peckham Rye Common,**  
photograph by Robert Larkin-Frost



**Peckham Rye Park,**  
photograph by Vera Dohrenbusch

English. Traces of this stream can still be seen here near the boating lake, although most of it now runs underground.

### 7 The Ballad of Peckham Rye

There is a legend that Queen Boadicea (Boudicca) took her own life here following her defeat by the Roman Army in c. 60AD. In Muriel Spark's novel The Ballad of Peckham Rye, published in 1960, it is imagined that this incident happened on the bowling green. It describes the demonic influence of Dougal Douglas on various residents of Peckham Rye in the 1950s and the many Peckham pubs they frequented.

### 8 Boating Lake

The name Peckham Rye refers to the River Peck; 'rye' means a watercourse in Old



**The I Am You Tree (mORGANICo) Peckham Rye,** photographs by Robert Larkin-Frost