

## Ladywell Circular Walk

Ladywell Fields has changed dramatically over the last decade, particularly in the northern part of the park, which this walk covers.

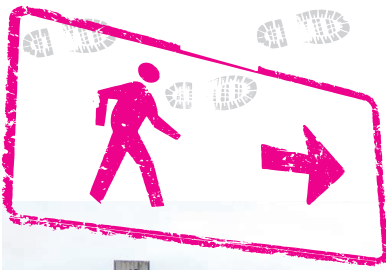
What was a stretch of green grass has been transformed by a new river channel. When first opened, the park was known as Ladywell Recreation Ground. Later this was changed to Ladywell Fields but there are still people who can remember playing on 'Ladywell Rec'.

**DISTANCE:** 1.4 km / 0.9 miles    **WALKING TIME:** 30 Min    **WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:** Yes  
**STATIONS:** Ladywell    **BUS ROUTES:** 122, 284, P4

### What will you discover?

- Meandering river
- Churchyard trees and fern
- Wildflowers and butterflies
- Diverse park trees
- Parakeets and wagtails
- Fish and waterlife





## Look out for Waterlink Way signs or London Cycle Route 21 which mark the walk...

- 1 Enter Ladywell Fields from Ladywell Road.** Immediately in front of you is a seating area looking over the park. Gazing out over Ladywell Fields today presents a very different prospect to that enjoyed in previous times. The hill you are standing on is artificial, constructed to lift the road over the new railway line back in the nineteenth century.

In 1889 when the park was purchased there were few trees and the largest landmark was St Mary's Church off to your left. The main channel of the river is also to your left and it was plainly visible, wider and wilder than it is today. The land in front of you was all flood meadows cropped for hay but also grazed by cows and sheep. To your right unobstructed from view was the railway line - raised to prevent flooding and now mostly hidden by trees.

Even in 2006, the prospect was very different. The trees to the left and right were pretty much as present but in front of you replacing the flood meadows were playing fields - now a meandering river runs through it. **Take the path to your left downhill.**



2014



1889

The Victorians changed South London from a rural economy to the suburban area we live in today. What they did resulted in the loss of farmland and farming as a way of life.

They were also responsible for saving fragments of it, in a much altered form, and that is what we have here at Ladywell Fields today.

- 2 Optional route (recommended)** - A detour to your left crossing the bridge takes you into the old parish churchyard of St. Mary the Virgin. If you walk around towards Lewisham High Street you can access the churchyard. This has Yew trees and a high diversity of wall ferns growing on the old walls and tombs including Wall Rue, Black Spleenwort and Hartstongue. You can find various interpretative panels telling you more about the church, churchyard and the Ravensbourne flood plain. Retrace your steps to point [2] on the map to continue the walk.

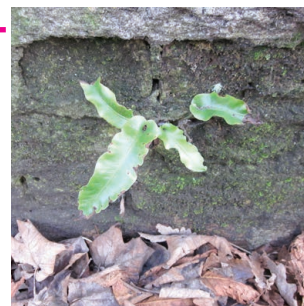
**Continue on down the slope crossing the new river channel.** Further ahead you can see where it curves back to rejoin the Ravensbourne. **Keep walking along the path;** on your right is a wildlife meadow area that is allowed to grow long in the summer. Eventually you will arrive at a bridge that leads to the hospital.



Garlic Mustard



Orange-tip on Bluebell



Hartstongue Fern



Black Spleenwort



### Garlic Mustard & Orange-tips

Whilst never a rare plant, Garlic Mustard has certainly increased in Lewisham, possibly due to less rigorous management over the last 20 years or so. Consequently there has been an increase in Orange-tip butterflies, as Garlic Mustard is one of their primary food plants.

They can be seen on the wing about April/May time. Only the males have orange tips to their wing the females have black tips.

**3 Standing on the bridge you have the new weir in front of you.** This diverts part of the river into the new channel, which was created in 2007. The main purpose of it is to provide water storage and help prevent flooding, but also to improve the ecology of the river. The river in the original channel is almost entirely shaded whilst the new channel has been designed to mimic a more natural meandering river. It is also more open and because it receives direct sunlight it supports a greater range and diversity of plants and waterlife.

The weir is a good place to look out for Grey Wagtails, which are sometimes seen bobbing up and down hunting for insects. Lewisham Hospital is on the other side of the river (containing café and toilets). The hospital started life as a Workhouse for the aged and infirm and evolved to become a valuable facility supporting the local community now.



< Grey Wagtail

**Keep walking along the path with the river on your left.** In spring this area erupts with wildflowers particularly Cow Parsley, a common wildflower under trees. This is a native species that can dominate in some circumstances. In more shaded areas, a plant that has escaped from gardens and that is spreading along the river can be found. This is the Hybrid or Garden Bluebell, which has broader leaves and a lighter blue flower than our native bluebell.



< Garden Bluebells

**Continue along to the next bridge over the river just past Lewisham Hospital.** The bridges in the park have all been made more functional and able to withstand the number of people using them. When first laid out, there were 6 'rustic' bridges crossing the river.



**4 Continue past the playground, you come to another bridge** from which you can look down into the river. You may see shoals of Roach with red fins swimming about. Looking downriver some young dead trees can be seen - these are elm killed by Dutch Elm Disease.

Beyond the bridge is the running track and other sports facilities and to your right is a bridge that goes over the railway line to the southern part of the park. It is suitable for pedestrians and bike users (covered by Walk 3 – 'Going to the Dogs').



< Beetle tram lines and exit holes in bark.



Manna Ash Bud



Common Ash Bud



Manna Ash in flower

**Turn around and walk back up the field with the railway on your left.**

There are some large Ash trees on your right as you walk along here towards the café. Most are the native species of Ash but in amongst them are some Manna Ash. This is a tree from southern Europe from which a sugary sap was extracted ("manna from heaven"). It differs from our species in having creamy flowers, rounder leaflets and grey buds in winter rather than the black buds of Common Ash.

The narrow railway embankment along here has lots of young wild trees growing on it. Oaks, elms and ashes are all common along here, as well as a tree best looked for in winter when it still retains its green leaves; this is a hybrid between Holm Oak and Turkey Oak and is entirely wild.



Parakeets

## Bird Life

A near constant presence through the park are the parakeets. Love them or hate them, they have spread through Lewisham parks over the last two decades. But listen out on a summer's eve for a bird that repeats a whimsical cluster of warbling phrases two or three times before changing tune, this is the song of Song Thrush. Blackbirds can also be heard fluting their melody in a very relaxed and pleasing manner. It is a simple but sweet song, sung with a variety of verses, and these birds frequently end the day with a very distinctive 'chinking chorus.'

**5** You now come to a café with toilets next door, a small childrens' playground and a broad area of riverbank. This is a good place to sit and watch people enjoying the river. It has become a popular haunt with parents and young children for playing in the river and catching waterlife and there is plenty to be looked for.

Fish caught here include Three-spined Stickleback, Stone Loach and European Eel. Stickleback males change colour during the spring and summer breeding season and have a prominent red underside and blue eyes. Chinese Mitten Crabs have also been caught here among many other invertebrates including water scorpions, water boatmen, damselfly and dragonfly larvae, shrimps, and mayfly larvae. The beautiful Banded Demoiselle is a new species of damselfly that turned up here after the restoration. More information on the waterlife to be seen here can be found at [www.riversandpeople.com](http://www.riversandpeople.com)



River Dipping



Water Scorpion



Eel



Sticklebacks



Lesser Water Boatman



Banded Demoiselle Larvae

Banded Demoiselle Damselfly &gt;



Nettles have become a prominent feature along the riverside. Some nettles are good for all kinds of butterflies including Peacocks. The caterpillars feed on the long nettles and can be found in large numbers on a patch of nettles in direct sunlight.



Peacock Caterpillars



Peacock Butterfly

**6** Continuing along the path, the former waiting room for Ladywell Station is on your left. It is a listed building and was converted to an environmental education classroom in the early 1990s and is still used today by local schools and community groups.

You are now heading back up the hill to the viewpoint where you started.

For more guided walks along Lewisham's rivers please visit [www.riversandpeople.com](http://www.riversandpeople.com)