

Blue Plaque Crystal Palace

From Crystal Palace Station booking hall (*café*), turn right into the Park. Turn left to enter the **Crystal Palace Museum** (*open Sundays from 11am until 3pm during GMT; until 4pm during BST, last admission then at 3.30pm; admission free, donations invited*). On leaving the Museum, walk NNE part way across the site of the Palace.

Turn right and descend steps to a large bust of **Sir Joseph Paxton**. Turn back up the steps, turn right, then head half left over grass to its corner. Turn right (NW) along a roadway leading to Westwood Hill, A212.

Turn right again to reach a **Blue Plaque** on the boundary wall (*right*), behind which stood 'Rockhills', home of **Sir Joseph Paxton, MP** (1803-1865), from 1852 until 1865. He was a gardener by profession, and won the competition to design the main building for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park with an innovative design similar in principle to a glasshouse. The need for load bearing walls was dispensed with by the use of an iron frame, which in turn enabled the entire exterior surface to be covered in transparent glass instead of opaque conventional materials. This method of construction is now common, and solves the problem of how to construct buildings which are too tall to be supported by masonry walls.

Specifications required the building to be removed from Hyde Park after the Exhibition was closed. After the building was dismantled, it became available for use elsewhere at less cost than the construction of a similar building. It was decided to retain its original function and to re-erect it on the summit of Sydenham Hill, a site within easy reach of central London. It commanded a bird's eye view of the city and extensive views southwards as far as the North Downs. Crystal Palace Station was located at the boundary of the Palace grounds, whilst a new branch line was built to provide direct access to the Palace itself.

During the evening of 30 November 1936 a catastrophic fire broke out, and rapidly became uncontrollable. **Sir Henry Buckland** (1870-1957), who shares a **Blue Plaque** with Joseph Paxton, was living at 'Rockhills' at this time. Management of the site passed to Bromley Council as a consequence of the abolition of the Greater London Council. Continue westwards, then take the entrance leading south back into the Park. Turn left (E) and follow the Capital Ring waymarkers past the Maze (*right*) and the lake (*left*). Bear right (SSW) to the main avenue, where turn left.

On reaching the public conveniences (*left*) bear right past the café (*right*) down to the ponds containing the models of the **Prehistoric monsters** created by **Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins**. Bear right and follow the Park boundary path past a small animal farm (*left; toilets*) to the two rail stations. Here turn left (SW), then cross Anerley Hill, A214, and turn left down the hill.

Turn right along the aptly named Hamlet Road to No. 5 (*left*), on which a **Blue Plaque commemorates Ira Aldridge** (1807-1867), the black Shakespearean actor who once lived there. Continue along Hamlet Road to the crossroads, then turn right up Belvedere Road, passing a Penfold letter box.

On the front wall of 'Fossil Villa', No. 22 (*left*) is a **Blue Plaque to Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins** (1807-1894 *sic*), who lived here from 1856 until 1872.

Turn right down Cintra Park to No. 28 (*left*), where there is a **Blue Plaque** recording the childhood home of **Marie Stopes** (1880-1958), promoter of sex education and birth control, from 1880 until 1892. Continue to Anerley Hill and turn right. Cross to the approach road to **Crystal Palace Station**. Finish there, or at the nearby **157 / 249 / 358 / 410 / 432 bus stop**, after **2.7 miles**.

Blue Plaque Beckenham and Anerley

See the above titled guide in this series for details of a nearby walk which can be started or finished in Croydon Road, A213.