

# “a shabby London suburb?”

a walk around the working class  
and radical history of  
Hammersmith

# a wander round the working class and radical history of hammersmith

This walk was originally researched and drawn up by members of the *West London Anarchists & Radicals* group (since defunct), who guided about 30 people around the walk on Friday 3 May 2001. The walk was part of the Mayday Festival of Alternatives. The walk lasted about two hours and at the end we finished off with a few pints in one of Hammersmith's oldest pubs, the *Dove*. In August 2004 the walk was retrodden as a roving *South London Radical History Group* event.

Some additional information has been added by interested mudlarks at the with permission of the walk's original architects.

Numbers in circular boxes refer to points on the map on page 18.

*The title of this pamphlet is a description of Hammersmith by William Morris, from his classic communist Utopian novel, News From Nowhere. The main character, based on Morris himself, lives in Hammersmith; he falls asleep in “the shabby London Suburb”, discontented, alienated, and longing for a better world - and wakes in a distant future where capitalism has been overthrown and everyone lives happy, useful and free.*

START: HAMMERSMITH TUBE STATION ①  
(Hammersmith and City Line )

The most famous revolutionary in Hammersmith was William Morris, who we will encounter many times, but there is much more to our local radical history than Morris. For example, Hammersmith was a stronghold of the National Union of the Working Classes in the early 1830s. Meetings were held here, as in other working class areas, in the lead up to the Battle of Coldbath Fields, where radicals fought a pitched battle with police in Clerkenwell. Later the local branch of the Chartist League met a short distance from here in Hammersmith Road, many times between 1842 and 1848. Chartist

demagogue Feargus O'Connor lived in King Street in 1837.

### *Up Shepherds Bush Road to Hammersmith Palais* 2

Hammersmith Palais: The building was originally a roller skating rink and opened as the Palais in 1919. It was an important place of working class entertainment as a popular dance venue. You will no doubt remember it from



the Clash song '*White Man in Hammersmith Palais*'. The Clash were closely associated with West London, the members of the band all living locally. The Palais closed a few years ago in dubious circumstances when the owners wanted to convert it to offices. When it was reopened and renamed Poo Na Na, the original sign was presented to a bemused Joe Strummer, lead singer of the Clash. Since then it seems to have reverted to its old name...

### *Hammersmith Police Station* 3

The police station is notorious. On Christmas Eve 1990 the cops rounded up lots of Irish men for being drunk. One such man, Patrick Quinn, was killed in the cells by the cops who then framed fellow Irishman and prisoner, Malcolm Kennedy, for his murder.

It took Malcolm years to clear his name.

In the late 1950s, the area between Hammersmith and Notting Hill was, at the best of times, a violent playground for gangs. Leaving aside the local

warriors, it was handy for Teds from Fulham, Battersea and Elephant and Castle in the south-east who would come over for a skirmish. Violence between the various factions, the police and any unfortunate bystanders was endemic. In 1958 several policemen were injured in Hammersmith when they went to deal with a crowd of youths who were creating a public nuisance in Fulham Palace Road.

Up Shepherds Bush Road, at no 190, was for years the old Hammersmith and Fulham Unemployed Workers Centre, a drop-in space, organising and advice centre. Sadly now closed down due to funding cuts.

### *Look towards Brook Green* 4

Brook Green was the site of St Pauls School for posh girls. The school had to stop using the public baths in 1908 as the local bad boys of Hammersmith pulled their pigtails. A good example of class warfare!

Dick Turpin was known to frequent the Queens Head pub (in which you can still enjoy a pint)

Brook Green Fair was held here for centuries, but was banned in the 1820s, when such rowdy gatherings were being suppressed as they terrified the authorities and upset religious reformers, because of the explosion of sex and drink that accompanied them. They also were annoying the middle classes who were colonising the villages near London to escape the Smoke.

In the 1930s Hammersmith Council planned a grand new Town Hall in the middle of Brook Green; locals protested so much they built it in King Street instead.

Look towards Hammersmith Flyover. The flyover was built 1966-70. There were protests at the opening from nearby residents, over the traffic noise. They demanded to be rehoused.

### As you walk back through Hammersmith Broadway 5 look to your left.

Here you will see the building that in the 1980's housed the offices of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) Support Group. The ALF are the militant wing of the animal rights movement, best known for freeing animals from laboratories.

There was trouble on the Broadway in the 1926 General Strike. On 6<sup>th</sup> May

TUC HQ sent a panicked letter after receiving reports of a “*bad riot at Hammersmith outside OMS HQ. it is said stones were thrown and police used batons.*” It seems “*buses were stopped near the station, and various parts removed by the strikers. When some of the buses returned at 8.30 pm some of the occupants began to jeer at the crowd some of which became angry and boarded some buses roughly handling the drivers and conductors one of whom was badly injured*” (shame). “*Local fascists began to throw stones from a building near by. Later the police made a charge using their batons, and arrested forty three people only one of which was a trade unionist and he was released owing to a mistake being made.*”

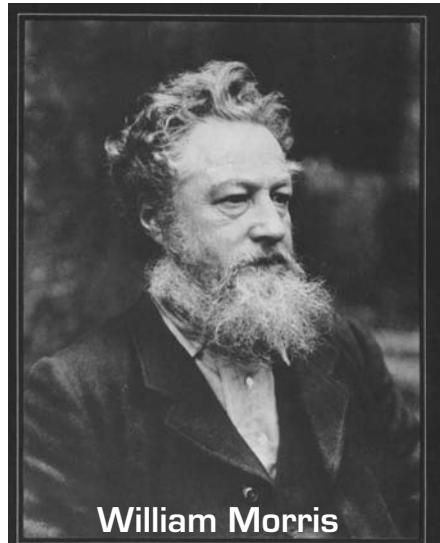
Shortly after this time the local National Unemployed Workers Movement branch was campaigning over the means test & the dole. The NUWM branch had 1200 members here in 1931.

### *Up Beadon Road into the square* 6

Where Turners Florist stands was the site of Hammersmith bookshop from 1948 -1964, where you could buy revolutionary and radical publications. A plaque now marks the spot.

We are now standing at one of the places where William Morris spoke at open-air meetings. For example on 17th April 1887 his diary records “*meeting fair, also a good one at Walham Green [which is in Fulham] and at our room in the evening where I lectured*”. Speaking at three meetings in a single day was common for Morris at this time.

William Morris moved to Hammersmith in 1878, when he was already well established as a designer. In 1883 he joined Henry M. Hyndman’s Marxian Democratic Federation (later the Social Democratic Federation). Hyndman was known by the derogatory nickname ‘socialist in a top hat’. Morris (along with others) broke with the SDF in 1884 and formed the Socialist League. In



**William Morris**

a letter dated 1st January 1885 Morris complained of Hyndman's jingoism and sneers at foreigners, pointing out that the SDF would at best bring about a kind of Bismarckian State Socialism. He said: "*I cannot stand all this, it is not what I mean by socialism either in aim or in means; I want a real revolution, a real change in Society: Society a great organic mass of well regulated forces used for the bringing about a happy life for all*".

Morris is perhaps better known today as a designer of wallpaper, but he was an important revolutionary whose view of the transformation to communism was strongly influenced by the Paris Commune. He was anti-parliamentary at a time when only the anarchists supported such views. Indeed this was to become the reason for the split in the Socialist League. For the election in November 1885 the League issued a leaflet entitled "*For Whom Shall we Vote*", which concluded by urging "*do not vote at all*". Two thirds of the electorate usually take his advice! Instead the leaflet explained that "*the time will come when you will step in and claim your place and become the new born society of the world*". Morris combined this outlook with distaste for politicians.

The *William Morris* pub is a recent addition, replacing a market. Inside you can see pictures of the Socialist League and examples of Morris's designs.

One cause the SDF branch supported locally before the split was that of the local costermongers (poor street traders), in 1884, after the Board of Works threatened to ban them from their kerbside market... With help from the local SDF branch they resisted. Hammersmith costermongers were eventually forced to move by King Street shopkeepers in 1886, who feared competition. They resettled in North End Road, Fulham, which still has a cheap shopping ethos.

*Round the corner in Beadon Road* 7

On the morning of 23 September 1996 Diarmuid O'Neill, an alleged IRA member, was shot dead by the cops. He was unarmed and no weapons or explosives were found on the premises. Diarmuid was shot a total of six times and as he lay bleeding to death a police officer stood on his head. With blood pouring from him he was dragged down the steps of the house to the street. Just before Diarmuid was shot, another cop was heard to shout, "*shoot the*

*ucker*”. The blood was left for 2 days as a reminder to us locals.

Probably here, near the approach to the Hammersmith & City Line station, stood Carmagnole House, Railway Approach. James Tochatti lived here; he was a member of the local Socialist League branch, who was involved in a Hammersmith Anarchist group, c.1892. Despite the Hammersmith Socialist Society’s split from the Socialist League, Tochatti remained in close contact locally. Tochatti started an anarchist paper, *Liberty*, in January 1894. In April The *Liberty* group organised a defence campaign for a French anarchist, Meunier, who had been arrested & was awaiting extradition to France for alleged involvement in a bombing... he was deported & sentenced to Life. *Liberty* attempted to maintain a dialogue between anarchists, anti-parliamentary socialists & libertarians in groups like the Independent Labour Party – at a time when divisions between these wings of the socialist scene were increasing. Sadly, Tochatti’s ill-health led to the paper’s collapse in December 1896. Around 1911 however he became active again, speaking at meetings; “*his book-lined cellar under his shop...became something of a centre in Hammersmith for ‘young workmen disillusioned by the timid programmes of other parties’*” as well as old comrades.

Tochatti later lived at 13 Beadon Rd, and 6 Hammersmith Grove too. There were anarchists of this or a related scene in Hammersmith as late as World War 2, Several were involved in the transport movement, as in the East End.

*If you look round the corner into Hammersmith Grove*

8

This was a regular meeting point for demos... In May 1913: A local contingent marched from here as part of a large London-wide anti-militarist demonstration as WW1 approached.

*Walk through the square cross King Street & turn left, right on roundabout to St Paul’s Green*

9

Hammersmith was known as a place for free thinking and troublemakers. Hammersmith folk were involved in the Peasants Revolt of 1381: Local rebel John Pecche (a Fulham fisherman) was excluded from the General Pardon. But John Norman of Hammersmith was pardoned by name.

In 1647 the New Model Army agitators, elected agents of the rank and file of the army, to put forward their political and economic grievances, were quartered in Hammersmith in the Summer. At this time the radical political and religious views in the Army were not only leading soldiers to act independently against a growing alliance between moderate parliament and the defeated king, but also to make common cause with the Levellers against Army Grandees. These latter struggles against Cromwell and Ireton came to a head in the Putney Debates in November and the Ware Mutiny that followed... The Army dissidents set up a puritan chapel, probably in Union Court, now Foreman Court off the Broadway. The Levellers also had a group & printing press here (Laski).

In the 16th century Hammersmith was a place of non-believers, with no churches but many taverns. In 1722, in the first count, there were 28 public houses in the Broadway area, one for every 150 residents (the oldest was probably *The George*, which was originally called the *White Horse*). The Bishop of London (from his nearby house at Fulham Palace) had suggested taking a group of heretics to Hammersmith to be burnt. St Paul's Church was consecrated on 7th June 1630 - very late for a large Parish. Between 1757 - 1783 the Rev Thomas Sampson presided. He protested over being required to preach on a Sunday afternoon, on one Sunday refusing to perform his duties! The current church dates from 1887.

South from here is Fulham Palace Road, leading to Fulham. Where Charing Cross hospital now stands was the site of the workhouse, which was built in 1850 to house increasing numbers of the poor under a single roof. Later it became the hospital. In December 1991, there were 2 or 3 demos over cuts here. **10**

Opposite us (west side of Fulham Palace Rd) is the facade of Brandenbergh House. **11**

This was the home of the Lord of the Manor. Later it became a post office and the interior was removed to the Geffrye Museum. King George IV's estranged wife Queen Caroline lived at Brandenburgh House 1820-21, and died here. She had become very popular because of widespread hatred of the king, who had treated her pretty badly. When she died her funeral procession on 14th August 1821 from Hammersmith was turned into a riotous demo, erupting



**Brandenburgh House. Watermen and lightermen presenting an address to Queen Caroline, 3 October 1820. From a coloured print in Hammersmith Library.**

into fighting and 2 Hammersmith men, carpenter Richard Honey and George Francis, a brickie, were shot dead at Hyde Park Corner. A memorial stone was built to them in the churchyard after collections in pubs all over London. Brandenburgh House was pulled down after her death.

George IV had a hard time of it from locals: Radical

journalist Leigh Hunt, who lived at 7 Cornwall rd (now 16 Rowan Rd, off Brook Green), was jailed in 1816 for libelling Georgie Porgie (while he was still prince regent) in his paper the *Examiner*.

*Walk to Hammersmith Bridge to left side and go under the bridge* 12

**Hammersmith Bridge:** The first bridge was a toll bridge was built in 1827. The current bridge dates from 1887.

Regular public talks were given under the bridge by William Morris on Sunday mornings, who complained when the Salvation Army, who had the pitch before him, used to overrun. To the meetings they bought the League banner, designed by Walter Crane and worked by May Morris. There were also reports of the meetings being interrupted by the police. After the meetings, the Socialist League often marched to Hyde Park or Trafalgar Square. On 13th November 1887 (which became known as bloody Sunday) 200 socialists were hurt, 2 killed, and 100 arrested at a demo in the Square.

Morris described Mayday as: “*Above all days of the year, fitting for the protest of the disinherited against*



**Leigh Hunt**

*the system of robbery that shuts the door between them and a decent life". A number of Morris's lectures have been published, including "How we live and how we might live" and "The society of the future".*

The bridge later became a favourite target for IRA bombers. The first was planted on 29th March 1939, as one of first mainland targets. A passer spotted the bomb by who threw it in the river so it caused minimal damage. In 1996 another IRA attempt was foiled, but they succeeded in 2000 and the bridge closed for over a year.

The IRA connection, unsurprisingly in an area long known for its Irish community, goes back much further though: Michael Collins, later IRA leader in the 1919-21 War of Independence, lived at 5 Netherwood road (off Brook Green) in 1914-15 and worked in the Post Office Savings Bank in Blythe rd.

### *Walk along the river to the Blue Anchor Pub* 13

*Blue Anchor:* In 1893 the composer Gustav Holst took rooms in Hammersmith. He attended meetings of the Hammersmith Socialist League and became a socialist. In 1897 he became conductor of Hammersmith Socialist Choir. Later, in 1905, he became musical director of St Pauls Girls School (remember those pigtails), as he needed the money. Although he composed works for the posh girls, he found them to be hopeless, and preferred teaching working class boys at Morley College. He is best known for writing The Planets Suite, but he wrote the *Hammersmith Suite* in this pub, in memory of his socialist days.

### *Walk into Furnival Gardens* 14

Furnival Gardens: Originally the Creek ran from Stamford Brook to the river, and this was the site of slums, factories and wharves, an area known as Little Wapping. On the riverside was the centre of heavy industry: Oil mills, lead works and Boat building. Behind this teeming slums where workers lived, in overcrowded and terrible conditions. Narrow alleys wove between



**Gustav Holst**

factories, sheds and mills, each with their fumes and effluent.

In 1846 the District Medical Officer wrote: “*Almost every house is visited with epidemic diarrhoea, so violent as to be mistaken for Asiatic cholera*”. The same report recorded that: “*The scanty supply of water, the crowded state of the dwellings, the overflow of privies and cesspools, all combine to poison and destroy the health of the poorer inhabitants of Hammersmith and are allowed to create and perpetuate more than half of the diseases which are incidental to human nature itself.*”

The Creek was filled in in 1936 but the Furnival Gardens were not created until created in 1951.

*Walk under the underpass down Macbeth Street and left through Riverside Gardens* 15

The slums stretched from the river to King Street, an area now bisected by the A4. Histories of the area comment on the stark contrast between the slums and the grand buildings in King Street.

Riverside Gardens was part of the homes fit for heroes building program as slum clearance by the Council and completed in 1928. Neighbouring Aspen Gardens was built for returning soldiers after the 2nd World War and was opened in 1948 by Nye Bevin. At the fifty years celebration a plaque was unveiled by ex-Labour leader Michael Foot to his mentor.

The estate was the first to defy a local council and vote against voluntary stock transfer in the 1980’s.

*Walk to the Town Hall* 16

The Town Hall was built in the 1930’s, when the creek was filled in. Hammersmith first had a Labour council in 1937 and, save for a few short periods, it remained Labour – till 2006. The first black mayor, Randolph Berrisford, was appointed in 1975.

The Council and the health authority compete to be the largest employer locally. There have, of course, been many demonstrations here and strikes amongst council workers. One we remember was the nursery workers strike, when the Council decided in the early 1990’s to close all nursery provision. A

couple of council workers scaled the town hall, removed the corporate red flag, and gave it to the striking nursery workers. It was last seen shredded on the front page of the local paper.

### *Walk to the Hampshire Pub* 17

Hampshire Pub: this street was previously Hampshire Hog Lane, which ran into the slums behind, close to New Street. Formerly called the Hampshire Hog. In November 1905 it opened as a social (temperance) club for working men. A mock parliament was established in 1906 and by 1910 it was debating a '*Poor Law Amendment Bill*' and whether there could be a socialist government in office, but not in power.

### *Walk down King Street to statue of William Bull* 18

Hammersmith first returned a Labour MP in 1924. Prior to that it's most famous MP had the great name of William Bull, who practised as a solicitor in the family firm of Bull and Bull! Bull was a Tory who supported votes for Women, and an egotist. The statue of the bull was moved here from the Black Bull Inn in Holborn in 1904. The gates of the park were erected in Bull's memory in 1933.

### *Walk down King Street*

The corner of Weltje Road 19 was another of William Morris's public speaking haunts.

The Hammersmith Radical Club, which was located on King Street, although we have not been able to discover exactly where, was a regular meeting place for the Socialist League. There were two other Radical Clubs in Overstone Road and the Broadway in the 1870s.

Also In King Street was the old Hammersmith Workhouse: After 1845 it was used for men and children only, as families were split up. Women were sent to Fulham Workhouse.

Look West towards Stamford Brook: The son of the anarchist sympathiser and impressionist painter Camille Pissarro, Lucien, lived here, as did the Russian

anarchist Stepniak. A rarely used railway branch line ran from Stamford Brook to South Acton. On a fateful day in 1895 Stepniak was killed by a train whilst crossing the line. Given the infrequency of the trains, this was almost certainly an accident, although some authorities suggest he committed suicide - in fact there is no evidence for this. He had fled Russia in 1878 after being involved in the assassination of the Tsarist chief of police. Stepniak had been living in nearby Bedford Park, and involved with Hammersmith Socialists. 1000s attended his funeral in Woking Crematorium... A footbridge was built over line as a result of his death.

### *Look down King Street*

The trendy Hart bar, previously the White Hart pub, was a meeting place for Protestant dissenters in 1706.

*Down Black Lion Lane on left side. Stop at French restaurant.* 20

In this street is the former home of MP Stephen Milligan, another



radical Tory, at least in sexual practices if not political life. In 1994 Milligan was found dead, tied to a chair, wearing women's underwear with a plastic bag over his head and a satsuma in his mouth. No one does it like a Tory MP!

*...satsumas were handed out on the original walk at this point...!*

Unusually, St Peters church was built in 1829 to attract rich residents, rather than serve an existing population. One of those attracted more

recently is the doyen of the Workers Revolutionary Party, the Trotskyist actor Vanessa Redgrave, who still lives in St Peters Square (behind).

*Under the underpass to continuation of Black Lion Lane, at bottom turn right into Hammersmith Terrace and stop at No 8. 21*

This street has no less than 3 blue plaques, but there isn't one on no 8, the home of May Morris, daughter of William and an important socialist in her own right. May later edited her father's *Collected Works*. She was in love with George Bernard Shaw. Whilst he flirted with her, the love was unrequited and

she later married Harry Sparling, another member of the Socialist League. Perhaps there is no plaque because she was a woman?



**May Morris, HH Sparling, Emery Walker and GB Shaw at Kelmscott House, early 1900s.**

At no 7 lived Emery Walker, another member of the Socialist League and a founder of the Doves Press.

No 3 was the home of Edward Johnston, who designed the type for the Doves Press books.

The Doves Press itself was started at no 1 and was later moved along the river, where we will encounter it again.

*Walk along the river*

In May 1906 a demonstration was held at Clare Lodge, the home of Mrs Dora Montefiore which was located near here. She was refusing to pay income tax

*'as a protest at the exclusion of women from the parliamentary franchise'.* The following month a further demonstration in her support was attended by 60 working class women who had come all the way from Canning Town in the East End to lend their support.

It had been Sylvia Pankhurst who, in 1905, had helped to found the Fulham branch of the Women's Social and Political Union (the Suffragettes).

William Morris of course had been an early influence on Sylvia, both politically and artistically. Later her influence was to be felt in Hammersmith, when a rank and file workers' committee was formed at Davidsons local factory under the influence of Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation and the Russian Revolution.



**Dora Montefiore speaking at a Suffragette Meeting in Hammersmith, 1906**

A painting by Camille Pissarro contrasts the village of Chiswick with the heavy industry of Hammersmith, looking from Chiswick down the river. Ironically it is now in a private collection.

*Continue along the river to Kelmscott House* **22**

Morris lived here from 1878 until his death in 1896. He named it Kelmscott House, after his country home Kelmscott Manor. The house is owned by the William Morris Society and is open to the public on Thursdays and Saturdays. Inside you can see the printing press used by Morris, which is still used occasionally. On this was printed the *Commonweal*, the League's paper.

The second issue contained Engels “*England in 1845 and England in 1885*”, later published in “*The Condition of the Working Class*”. Other contributors included Paul Lafargue (Marx’s son in law), Shaw, Stepniak, and Belfort Bax.

George Bernard Shaw, echoing Morris’s views, said of the house: “*everything that was necessary was clean and handsome; everything else was beautiful and beautifully presented*”.

In 1885 Morris established the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League with Eleanor Marx and her husband Aveling. Meetings were held in the Kelmscott House Coach House. Speakers and lecturers here included:

- George Bernard Shaw, a Fabian. Reading Marx’s *Capital* in French had an overwhelming effect on him and he felt that he had discovered what was wrong with the world and why he was so miserable in it.



**Lucy Parsons**

- The Russian anarchist, Prince Kropotkin, a founder of the *Freedom* newspaper. He maintained his independence by neither joining the league nor writing for the *Commonweal*.
- Stepniak, who was a compelling speaker, if not always comprehensible.
- Lucy Parsons, the US Black revolutionary, wife of Mayday Martyr Albert Parsons and later founding member of the Industrial Workers of the World. She was a guest of the League in 1888 when she came on a speaking tour. She stayed at Kelmscott House.

- Socialist Annie Besant, one of the organisers of the 1888 East End match girls strike.

Audiences included Oscar Wilde, HG Wells and Yeats.

The Socialist League was increasing split between the ‘parliamentary’ (Eleanor Marx/Aveling) and anti-parliamentary (Morris) factions. In 1888 the anarchists seemed to be taking charge of the League and Aveling and Eleanor Marx split. In 1890 Morris left the league, as it was increasingly dominated by anarchists, and the local League branch became the Hammersmith Socialist Society, which again held their meetings here. His last lecture had as its title “*One Socialist Party*” and was given on 9th January 1896. On 3rd October he died. His body was taken up Rivercourt Road and by train to Kelmscott Manor. Shortly after his death the Socialist Society folded, in December 1896.

But in May 1911, a Hammersmith Socialist Society revived, as a result of a direct action-oriented split from the Social Democratic Party (the old SDF). In the 1930s Guy Aldred’s United Socialist

Movement had some support in London among old adherents of this long-defunct second Hammersmith Socialist Society.

Kelmscott Press was located opposite the *Dove* pub. 23



**The Dove**

Next to the pub is the Doves Press run by Cobden-Sanderson with Emery Walker. After they fell out with Morris, Cobden-Sanderson had a breakdown and threw all his type in the river.

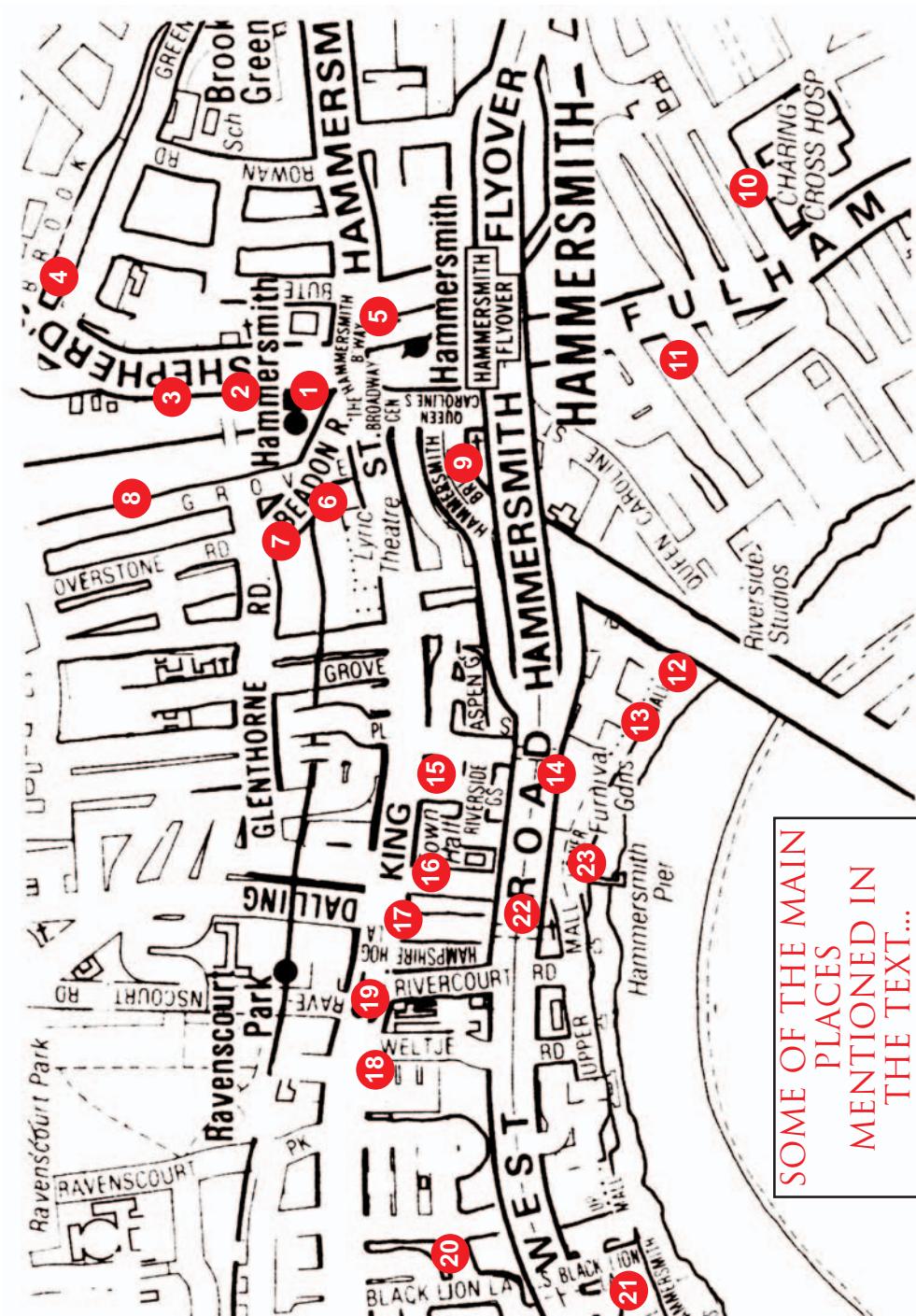
This ends our walk. But we can well imagine Morris, Eleanor Marx and the printers retiring to the *Dove* for a pint or a coffee!

*“Guests and neighbours, on the site of this Guest-hall once stood the lecture-room of the Hammersmith Socialists.  
Drink a glass to the memory!”*

William Morris, *News From Nowhere*.



**SCENE: HAMMERSMITH BROADWAY.**  
(Kensington lady meets an old servant who has married and lives in Hammersmith).  
- *Well, Harriet, and how do you like Hammersmith?*  
- *Ow, madam, I 'ate it. Rowdy 'ole. That King Street of a Saturday night is a pantechnicon.*



SOME OF THE MAIN  
PLACES  
MENTIONED IN  
THE TEXT...