



The oldest Tree in London?  
(Photo: Creative Commons)

## Folly Brook and Darland's Lake Nature Reserve

EMMA HOWARD

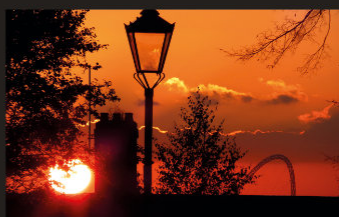
Growing up in a large family in Mill Hill, the usual weekend walk was to Mill Hill Park. However, a real treat as a teenager was the discovery of wonderful rural walks between Mill Hill and Totteridge. In fact, my sister and I sometimes used to walk to school in North Finchley via the fields on a weekend to do extra art classes: she was great at art, but I just enjoyed the walking!

A favourite walk starts at Finchley Nurseries in Burton Hole Lane and heads down the lane past Mill Hill Cricket Club right to the end. You then pick up the path along Folly Brook which rises in Mill Hill and forms Darland's Lake before eventually joining Dollis Brook in Woodside Park. There are several options here, but my favourite is to keep on this wooded path for about a kilometre passing through two metal gates before a gate on the right: go through this and you walk across an open field with wonderful views up to Totteridge and usually cattle grazing on your left.

You then arrive at a sign for Darland's Lake Nature Reserve; you can turn right here and walk round the lake and return the way you came. However, for a longer walk, I prefer heading straight on following the tree lined path up to Totteridge Lane emerging opposite the pretty St. Andrew's Church. This church is actually part of the Diocese of St. Albans. The graveyard contains an ancient yew tree thought to be 2000 years old and, if so, the oldest tree in London. It is one of the Great Trees of London so well worth a look. Many yew trees in church yards predate the churches eventually built there and the groups of yew trees

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Photo: Emma Howard

or old hollowed out trees were often used as an ancient site of worship affording shelter for worshippers.

Turn right into Totteridge Lane and head towards the Orange Tree). Shortly before the pub, take a right turn through a wooden hand gate into The Close – a private road with no parking permitted. There is a sign ahead of you marked 'Public Footpath to Darland's Lake' and a large notice board giving details of the Nature Reserve which is run by LB Barnet with a great deal of volunteer assistance. The path ahead opens out into surprising heathland with good views – walk straight ahead until you reach the lake. This is a shallow lake with reed beds and supports a great deal of wildlife although the old bird hide here has long gone. Take a left when you reach the lake and follow the path until you return to the first Darland's Lake sign board and from here head back to Finchley Nurseries for a well-earned trip to their café.

Distance? By the time I've wandered around my favourite garden centre for a bit, I get up to 10,000 steps so probably about 7 kms in all. Very muddy in parts so wellies are best in the winter. If you need something stronger after your walk, there's always the Adam & Eve pub on the Ridgeway.

I will reveal another of my favourite local walks in the next issue.



Photo: Emma Howard