

Exploring London – Archive File of Group Visits

Here is a record of our Exploring London visits from November 2016 through until October 2017. For most recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

2016

November



'Exploring London' visited the HQ of the **Royal College of Nursing** at 20 Cavendish Square. Our large group was divided in two for the tour and we discovered a gem in one of the oldest buildings in the area, largely ignored by busy shoppers heading for Oxford Street. 'Explorer' Rachel's blog on the visit [here](#) gives a detailed introduction to the history of the RCN, the building, and the displays which can be examined in the museum and library areas ... and reminds us that there's a very useful 'off-the-beaten-track' café to find!

Twenty five Explorers enjoyed visits to two chapels hidden away on the Strand. At **King's College Chapel** we were given an excellent talk on the history and design of this Grade I listed building by one of the chaplains, the Revd Tim Ditchfield. First completed in 1831, it was reconstructed to a design by the Victorian architect George Gilbert Scott in 1864 and has since undergone several developments up until the latest restoration in 2000-2001, which have ensured that the design of the Chapel remains sensitive to tradition while



being relevant to the current generation of users. New stained glass windows designed by Joseph Nuttgens include the east window which combines Scott's original ideas of scenes from the life of Christ with modern representations of the various faculties within the college. Following the talk we had time to explore the Chapel before a short walk along the Strand brought us to the Grade II listed **Queen's Chapel of the Savoy**. Here we were greeted with a very welcome spread of tea, coffee and cakes while listening to a Christmas CD of the Chapel choir. The steward of the Chapel, Thomas Leyland, then entertained us with an informative talk on the history of the Savoy estate from the 13th century to the development of the present day Chapel, which originally formed part of the Hospital of Savoy. Highlights include the striking ceiling, restored in 1999, and the stained glass windows, including one dedicated to the D'Oyly Carte family and another commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1937 the Chapel became the Chapel of the Royal Victorian Order and the coats of arms of the recipients of the Order are displayed on the Chapel walls. Two very enjoyable and informative visits in one morning! (Report by Brenda Dardelin, photo by Mary McMinn).

December



Our biggest group ever (40 people booked places!) ventured to Fish Island, next to the Olympic site, for a visit to **H. Forman and Son** for a seasonal visit! Forman's is a fourth-generation company, founded in 1905 ... and the last of the dozens of salmon smokehouses to survive in East London. In the new premises, built when the company was relocated in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics, the company now has a production area, exhibition and function space and a full-service restaurant.

We were greeted with tea and coffee as we donned our overalls for a visit to the factory. Fresh salmon were being prepared for smoking, and then sliced and packaged, but as it was such a busy period, our time in the factory was limited and after chatting to the skilled staff (and discovering how many layers of clothing you need to wear to keep warm while preparing large, wet fish!) we went back to the function area where we learned more of the history of the company and how it has diversified in recent years. Our 'host' for the morning, Darren, demonstrated both his skill in hand-slicing a side of smoked salmon and his gift for spontaneous and entertaining repartee! As it was so near the festive season it seemed appropriate to finish with generous tasters of Forman's salmon, mulled wine ... and a chance to shop early for Christmas!

2017

January

More than 30 Explorers joined in the annual review and tea-party at the **Walter Sickert Community Centre** on 5 January. Our photo shows one of our reasons to get together. We pooled our left-over Christmas cakes and other treats! We shared ideas for additions to 2017's programme of Explorations — and there were plenty forthcoming which will be researched and publicised. We were especially keen to include visits which are free or low-cost and will be keeping our eyes open for these. (Email the group co-ordinator if you have any suggestions for visits in the future and if you'd be willing to make some of the arrangements).



This visit was to the City's **Guildhall**, including the Guildhall itself, the Art Gallery and Roman Amphitheatre, St Lawrence Jewry and the new City of London Police Museum in the Guildhall Library. So much history in such a small area. Again City of London Guide Jill Finch proved to be a very knowledgeable guide. For full report see [here](#).



There was a repeat of this visit in February.

February



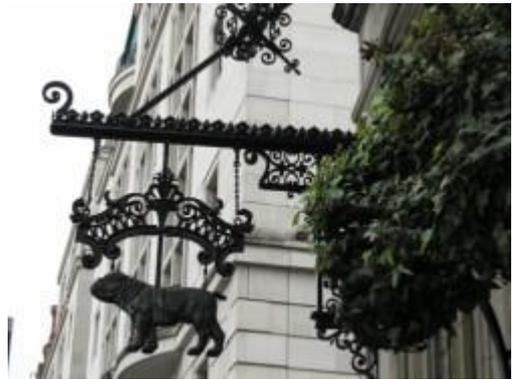
We headed west to Kensington where we visited two contrasting artists' houses, both managed by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea: **18 Stafford Terrace**, the modest family home of Edward Linley Sambourne in the morning, and then in the afternoon, **Leighton House**, the home, studio and exhibition space of Frederick, Lord Leighton. Some of us also managed to fit in a quick lunch in the new Design Museum ... a possible future 'Exploration' in its own right!

Picture: some of our group members leave Leighton House. A more detailed report for 18 Stafford Terrace is [here](#) (Tim Maby), and for Leighton House [here](#) (Julie Howell).

March

It's becoming an annual tradition for London Explorers to visit **Two Temple Place** when it opens each spring, and on 8 March eighteen of us spent an enjoyable couple of hours inside the spectacular building, built for William Waldorf Astor in the late 19th century and now maintained by the Bulldog Trust. This year's exhibition focusses on 'Sussex Modernism: Retreat and Rebellion' with more than 120 items chosen from collections such as Farley Farm and Charleston and galleries including Pallant House, Chichester and the Towner in Eastbourne.

Compared with previous years, personally I felt that the displays rather overwhelmed the building, as they necessitated erecting false walls and putting a very large sofa — designed by Salvador Dali and based on Mae West's lips! — in the entrance hall. However, the richness of the exhibition means that I, for one, will certainly be returning before the show closes on 23 April and I thoroughly recommend it.



The 'Exploring London' group took the last public tour of the **Whitechapel Bell Foundry**, which will be closing its Whitechapel premises in May. The visit report with photos is a joint effort by Rosie Walden, Alison Taggart, Rachel Summerson, Pauline Frost and Liz Simpson and available [here](#).

There is also a blog link about the visit [here](#).

April

The 'Explorers' followed the route of the lost **Fleet River** starting from outside the Blackfriar Pub. Photo by Pauline Frost. The report by Lindsay Wakeman follows [here](#).



May



On **May 2 and 4**, four small groups of 'Explorers' visited the **Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School** on Clerkenwell Green: the building is so cramped that only small groups can be accommodated so we had to schedule four visits to cope with the demand — the photo shows the first group, enjoying the sun before going in! The Grade II Listed building was opened in 1738 as a charity school and was later used as workshops, a pub, a coffee and meeting house and printing press before the Library and Workers' School was established in

1933, marking the 50th anniversary of Marx's death. Guides led the groups down into the basement tunnels which predate the current building and now house archives, and up to the Reading Room with its fresco by Jack Hastings (1934) and the Lenin Room — where he edited 17 issues of 'Iskra' during 1902-3 while in exile in London. The archives and collections are significant, including a large collection on the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Every inch of wall-space appears to be covered with photographs, posters, commemorative plaques and china, marking significant episodes in labour history ... appropriately for Clerkenwell, the 'headquarters of republicanism, revolution and ultra-nonconformity' according to a *CityPress* correspondent in 1871!

June

We went to The Museum of London Docklands, to see "**Tunnel — The Archaeology of Crossrail**". The exhibition is fascinating and well worth a visit. Like the rest of the museum, it is free and housed in a former sugar warehouse at West India Quay. (Their exhibition on London, Sugar and Slavery is also very interesting.)

Crossrail are constructing the Elizabeth Line from Reading and Heathrow in the west, to Shenfield and Abbey Wood in the east, tunnelling under central London at a depth of 30 or 40 metres. Most of the tunnels were too deep to disturb the archaeology, which is usually found within the top 9 metres below ground level, but where new stations and structures were built, and where the line connected with existing stations, or reached the surface, there was a unique opportunity to uncover London's past. The exhibition included information, maps, video and photographs of the process itself, the huge boring machines and how the tunnels were constructed, avoiding (sometimes quite narrowly) all the other tunnels, sewers and services which lie beneath our feet. The displays take us from east to west



through London's history from the Stone Age to the 20th Century. The city's Roman, Medieval, Victorian, industrial and domestic history are all represented by the material that was excavated, much of it from burial grounds and rubbish pits. The finds themselves include flint tools from the Mesolithic period found near Abbey Wood, mammoth bone and amber at Canary Wharf, evidence of a moated manor house at Stepney Green, and 16th century leather shoes preserved in the soil at Moorfields. Particularly interesting are Roman skulls, coins and other objects from the Walbrook area of the City, the skeletons and objects found at the cemeteries from the Black Death in the 14th century at Charterhouse and the Great Plague in the 17th century at the New Churchyard, discovered at Liverpool Street. (As a genealogist, I was especially struck by the work going on at the London Metropolitan Archives to record the burial registers for the New Churchyard, which was in use for 170 years until 1739.) Evidence of the industrial past, including the Thames Iron Works at Canning Town, and Crosse & Blackwell in Soho, all add to our knowledge of how ordinary people lived, worked and died in London. Many thanks to Liz, for organising the visit to one of the best exhibitions in London just now. It will run until 3 September 2017, and it's free! (Report by Molly Turner.)



London Explorers headed to Kew to visit the **Musical Museum** in its purpose-built HQ near Kew Bridge. The collection was founded more than 50 years ago by the late Frank Holland, and now ranges from the smallest musical box to a 'mighty Wurlitzer'. Volunteers play an essential role in the Museum, acting as guides and working behind the scenes: as our group can attest, we were extremely lucky to be taken on our tour by 86-year old Roy (who was an example to us all!). Thanks to fellow-Explorer Vivienne who suggested this visit —

and was then on holiday when we went and so missed it!

July

London Explorers ventured outside Zone 6 for a full day exploring **St Albans**. Rob, our guide, promised us the Wars of the Roses, the beginnings of film-making, an Art-Deco cinema and the story behind the Ryder Cup, plus the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Albans ... and Roman Verulamium! We weren't disappointed as the report shows — here is the group starting our visit with an introduction to the history of St Albans from our guide Rob. Read on for more [here](#).



August



Old Royal Naval College's Painted Hall. 'London Explorers' headed to Greenwich this time focussed on two architectural gems, Inigo Jones's Queen's House — recently reopened after a major restoration project — and the Painted Hall of the Old Royal Naval College, part of Wren's buildings for the Hospital for Seamen, to see the ceiling being cleaned and conserved. The reports [here](#) by Janet and Maggie give an excellent idea of what we achieved after coffee in the Maritime Museum! This photo shows the group in hard hats and high-viz

jackets ready to climb the scaffolding in the Painted Hall!

September

Friday 1 September was a perfect sunny day for a garden-themed visit to **Lambeth**. First of all we met up at the Garden Museum, which was originally established as the Museum of Garden History in the 1970s in the redundant church of St-Mary-at-Lambeth by Rosemary Nicholson. Searching for the tomb of the Tradescants (father and son were both notable gardeners and plant collectors) she was horrified to discover the state of the church and its graveyard and determined to revive the location and set up a museum. The



latest redevelopment has enhanced the church's interior, increased the exhibition display areas and built new visitor attractions including a well-reviewed cafe/restaurant — and loos. Sadly the original knot-garden designed by Lady Salisbury has been lost, though it has been replaced by a garden by Dan Pearson; the tombs of the Tradescants and Admiral Bligh (of 'Mutiny on the Bounty' fame) can still be seen. We spent an hour or so looking at the displays with one 'Explorer' heading up the church's tower, for magnificent views of Lambeth and the river, and then joined the queue for entry to Lambeth Palace Gardens for the last public opening of the summer. Some 'Explorers' signed up for a tour led by the head-gardener, while others viewed the gardens independently — but we all took advantage of the refreshment tent! The Great Hall and Library of the Palace and the Crypt Chapel were also open, which added to the experience. Rachel's blog on the visit [here](#) gives a detailed report on the afternoon in the Palace's gardens, with plenty more photos.

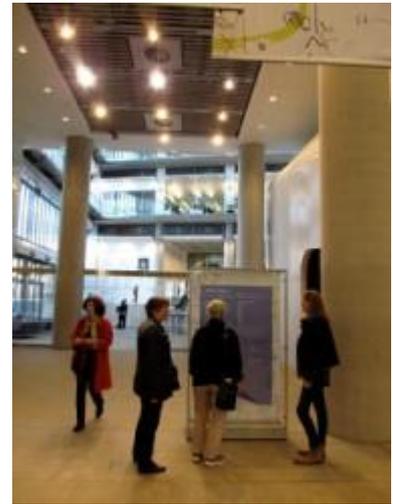
October



As this proved a popular event, we had to book for two groups of Explorers to head to **Kensal Green** on 4 and 6 October to visit the cemetery there. It's one of the 'Magnificent Seven' cemeteries established in the 19th century, which also include Highgate and our local Abney Park. Our tours on both days were led by Signe Hoffos, chair of the Friends of Kensal Green (www.kensalgreen.co.uk), and she kept us entertained with a wealth of stories about the cemetery and its 'residents'!

Certainly on the 4th it was a bit too chilly to be G K Chesterton's 'Paradise by way of Kensal Green' as can be seen from the photo ... the weather cheered up a bit on the 6th, when Explorer Rachel visited and wrote the blog which gives much more detail of the tour. [Blog](#)

37 London Explorers arrived at the **Francis Crick** Institute on 25 October, ready to have a look at the publicly accessible spaces and hear an introduction to the research institute's work from Hannah Camm, the Community Engagement Manager. The location wasn't ideal for our large group but in her wide-ranging talk she described the ethos behind the Institute, based on collaboration and sharing information. Funding has come from Wellcome, the MRC and Cancer Research UK, while the researchers (200-300 of them) are from UCL, Imperial and KCL. The impressive architecture of the new building features open-plan labs and offices, with break-out spaces for meeting and writing — a far cry from the traditional closed laboratory — and it is felt that it reflects the changes in science and research.



Explorers asked about how this collaborative process is working in reality and how information is being shared and disseminated. The involvement of the immediate community was emphasised, included a local Health and Wellbeing Centre and work with Camden schools. Explorers were encouraged to sign up for regular emails about outreach events, including 'Crick Chats' and an upcoming 'Science on Screen' season, so it's to be hoped that this will be the first of several visits for members of our group as the café and gallery are open to all, during working hours.

See next file for November 2017 onwards.