



Exploring London – Archive File of Group Visits

Here is a record of our Exploring London visits from November 2018 through until September 2019. For most recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

2018

November

On 05 November we visited Goldsmith's Hall. Report by Norman Willson with photos by Gilbert Vieri [here](#) and you can also see Rachel's blog [here](#).

November was a busy month for Explorers: on the 20th, 23 Explorers, in two groups, visited the Victorian premises of the Kirkaldy Testing Museum on Southwark Street just behind the Tate Modern. Run entirely by volunteers, it's a venue well-worth visiting on its open days. See www.testingmuseum.org.uk, and read Jill's report [here](#).

December

The **December** visit, with a festive touch, was to the Dennis Severs House on Folgate Street in Spitalfields while it is decorated for Christmas — a popular choice with many Explorers, some of whom had been hoping to visit for years. Our party were let into the house in groups of 10 — here's the last group waiting patiently outside in the cold! Read Judith's report [here](#).



2019?

January



Our main **January** visit was a tour of the Grade 2* listed **Old Vic Theatre** on Saturday 12 January. Twenty members were able to tour front of house and backstage — and as Rachel's detailed report shows ([here](#)) — learn so much about the building's history and its place in the development of the national ballet, opera and theatre companies from Ned, the guide. The photo (taken by Julia) shows Ned and our group in the 'Gods'.

February

Over two visits on 12 and 21 **February** to the **Salters' Hall**, nearly 60 'Explorers' were able to tour the modern hall of The Salters' Company, located just off London Wall on the edge of the Barbican. The recently refurbished building, originally designed by Sir Basil Spence, with David Hicks working on the interiors and garden, is a fine setting for the Worshipful Company of Salters, ninth in precedence in the 'Great Twelve' of City Livery Companies. The newly planted open spaces around St Alphage's ruined tower make this a very attractive part of London now.

Click [here](#) for Rachel's blog of her visit and [here](#) for Brenda's report — both were in the group on 12 February who were photographed in front of the Hall's gates.



March

A small group of 'Explorers' discovered the new **HQ for the Institute of Physics** on Caledonian Road in the afternoon of **March 5**, and were given a tour of the building by the Head of London Outreach, Louise Swan, before sitting down to watch the video installation *Time Tries All Things* by Grace Weir.

The IOP's new £30m purpose-built HQ was opened in autumn 2018 and for the first time gave the Institute spaces which are accessible by general visitors, in line with its emphasis on developing outreach programmes of public benefit, as well as serving its members. Visitors are welcome between 9.00am and 7.00pm every week-day; in the reception foyer you will find a cloud chamber which demonstrates cosmic rays naturally occurring in the atmosphere, and a huge interactive video screen where visitors can explore science topics. Smaller rooms will be offered to physics-based start-ups, while larger rooms can be booked by community groups. The IOP's engagement with local schools and colleges is already impressive — Gillespie Road Primary School's art works are on display in the foyer and 'A' level students of City and Islington College are co-operating in a European-wide project! Downstairs the gallery space currently shows Grace Weir's 'dual screen video installation ... a poetic meditation on the conceptions of time' while — in another initiative which blurs the boundaries between art and science — the Institute has co-operated with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in a concert series *Bach, the universe and everything*. The IOP's website is www.iop.org and is well-worth 'exploring'!



Hand & Lock Embroidery Studios: In mid-March, two small groups of 'London Explorers' had the opportunity to visit the fascinating premises of Hand & Lock on Margaret Street, just north of Oxford Street, thanks to Clara C who set up the visits for us. This company specialises in the type of high-end embroidery we recognise from couture shows and diplomatic and military uniforms and much of the hand and hand-guided machine work is still carried out in the London workrooms. Our photo (by Julia) shows our second small group

clustered around an embroidery frame in one of the work-rooms as Robert, our guide, demonstrated hand-stitching techniques for us. The company Hand & Lock had its beginnings in 1767, when Huguenot refugee M. Hand set up a workroom making gold 'lace' or 'braid'. Now it is one of the few reminders of the garment trade which flourished in the streets north and east of Oxford Street. Its shop is a source of

embroidery requisites and it runs courses for experienced and amateur embroiderers too — and its annual Prize for Embroidery encourages international designers and practitioners. Explorer Rachel's blog is [here](#) and it gives full details of the first group's visit and much more information about the company. See also www.handembroidery.com.

Two Temple Place: At the end of March, 'Explorers' made their annual visit to Two Temple Place where the 2019 exhibition was 'Ruskin: the Power of Seeing', part of this year's celebration of the bicentenary of John Ruskin's birth. Two Temple Place exhibitions are proving increasingly popular each year, and we had to make a group booking to be guaranteed access. Although it was busy inside it wasn't so crowded that the group were unable to appreciate the exhibition and explore the impressive building. Pauline F's report [here](#) gives a flavour of both, and includes photographs she took and some by Joy D too.



April

Westminster Abbey: 08 April saw a group of rather damp 'Explorers' joining the queues lining up outside Westminster Abbey as it opened at 9.30am to admit the first visitors of the day. What a contrast between the groups shuffling along the guided route and the airy spaces of the newly opened Queen's Jubilee Gallery in the Triforium! Our report has been compiled to give three different views of the visit [here](#), and Rachel's blog [here](#) is enhanced by images courtesy of Westminster Abbey so it's possible to get some idea of our impressions. Photography by visitors is not permitted in the Abbey — but there are one or two attractive postcards on sale in the shop!



King's Cross: On a damp day in late April, London Explorers returned to King's Cross for the third time since the group was set up — and each time there have been different places on the site to see. Architect-designed, high-end shops and wine bars have now overtaken the limited social housing, swimming pond and container garden we had seen before and, coincidentally on the week of our visit, the changes prompted a letter to The Standard from an ex-resident of King's Cross, regretting these trends. This visit is being repeated in June as

so many Explorers wanted to walk around King's Cross. This photo from Jo P shows the group ready to set off from the Visitor Centre; the report by Linda M [here](#) also includes more photos by Pauline F inside the Centre and during the walk.

May

Explorers revisited the 'Swinging Sixties' by heading off to the **Fashion and Textile Museum** on Bermondsey Street to see the current exhibition there — running to 2 June. The small venue meant we were booked in as two groups, in the morning and then in the afternoon. Both groups had the chance to explore the neighbouring area too — like much of London it's changing beyond recognition, with cafés, art galleries and design consultancies replacing the historic trades of leather-working and tanning reflected in the street names such as Tanner Street, Morocco Buildings and Leather Market. Gill L's report [here](#) is illustrated with photos by Sue I and Liz S.



June

On **04 June**, because our walk in April was so popular, and over-subscribed, we repeated our walk around the **King's Cross** development. Led by a guide from the Visitor Centre, the group set off to see the repurposed industrial buildings, new apartment blocks and other amenities ...and unfortunately it rained again, just like April! There's a report on this event in **April**.



The final early June visit on the **6th** took Explorers back to the Postal Museum — our photo could be called 'Waiting for the Train' as everyone opted to combine a visit to the Museum with a trip on 'Mail Rail', the underground rail system which delivered mail to major sorting offices around London before it was replaced by surface transport and mothballed until it reopened a couple of years ago as a visitor attraction.

Early June was a busy time for Explorers ... three events in less than a week! **On Sunday 2 June, Crossness Pumping Station** was open to the public, and a group of Explorers enjoyed the sunny day, learnt all about the Victorian Pumping Station and experienced the famous engine 'Prince Albert' in steam. Pauline F's illustrated report [here](#) gives a great impression of the day's visit. It's best to choose a Family Open Day to visit Crossness, as a shuttle bus service is laid on to and from Abbey Wood station, making travel much more convenient.



Rochester: Exploring London's annual 'day out' was on Friday 28 June and we 'explored' Rochester. Our group photo taken at the station shows most of us, ready to start our introductory guided walk led by Rob Smith (who has taken our group on several walks in past years). You can see a reflection of the Cathedral in the window! At the end of the walk we all met up together at the Cathedral and then we had plenty of free time in

the afternoon to return to some of the places we had passed on our walk. It was a revelatory day, even for people who had been to Rochester before — for a small city, it's packed with interesting buildings and museums, not to mention bookshops — and several Explorers have already made plans to return. Perhaps the only disappointment was that the river trip on the Medway had been cancelled by the company running the boat and so we couldn't add that to the day's events. The report on the day is a group effort by the Explorers listed, and the photos were contributed by Pat C, Pauline F and Sue L. Explorer Rachel S has written a blog on one of Rochester's gems, Restoration House (see her blog) as well, and there may be more to come ... This was the group's annual visit to somewhere further afield. Read a group report [here](#) and Rachel's blog [here](#).

July

Smithfield: Two groups of 'London Explorers' headed to Smithfield on 9 and 17 July to enjoy a stroll around the area led by our knowledgeable and entertaining City of London Guide Jill Finch. There were stories to enjoy at each stop we made. The circular route from Barbican Station included Charterhouse Square — some of us had been on a Brother's Tour of Charterhouse previously and were reminded about the evening garden openings in the summer; Smithfield Markets — where we could view the area under development for the new Museum of London; Cloth Fair with its well-preserved architecture — our photo shows the group listening to Jill near the house where John Betjeman lived; St Bartholomew's Hospital and the two churches, St Bartholomew the Great and St Bartholomew the Less. Jill took us into St Bartholomew the Less in the precincts of the hospital, and into the small volunteer-run hospital museum there. The displays include a short film on the foundation of the hospital by the monk Rahere and from inside the museum we got a great view of the large paintings by William Hogarth on the staircase up to the hospital's Great Hall.



August

No visits.

September



Museum of London Docklands: for what is proving to be an annual visit. This year's special exhibition there allowed us to 'explore' London's hidden rivers and waterways and Maggie B's report ([here](#)) gives an idea of the range of the displays. Sue L's photos have been chosen to illustrate the report including the statutory refreshments break! This additional photo on the webpage (taken by Sue from the DLR) gives a great impression of what visitors to Canary Wharf and the surrounding area can expect to see now. Fellow-Explorer Rachel

wrote an informative blog on the exhibition too, with plenty of additional illustrations — read it [here](#).

Exploring London have two visits to the headquarters of the **Institution of Civil Engineers** scheduled for the autumn: the first group visited on 24 September. Prompted by ICE's exhibition in the Library, 'Water: from source to tap' Explorers braved the monsoon conditions to visit One Great George Street, behind Parliament Square. ICE moved to their new HQ in 1913, having originally occupied 24-26 Great George Street. Their new building was an early example of steel-frame technology and has an extremely impressive interior. As well as the main entrance hall, foyer and staircases and the Library, the Great Hall with its floor to ceiling windows and commemorative ceiling painting, and the Telford Room lecture theatre were open to us. Reminders of civil engineers of the past are evident everywhere; each room is named after an engineer and imposing portraits look down on visitors. There's also a pleasant café downstairs!



The exhibition itself combined static and interactive displays, videos and plenty of Lego ... our group photo was taken by the ICE archivist and includes the 'Fatberg Monster' in the background! Three films were being shown on a loop, including a history of the civil engineering profession and its role in the future, introduced by Dan Cruikshank, so there's plenty to see and do; another London building worth 'Exploring' — read Rachel's blog [here](#) for more information.

See next file for October 2019 onwards.