

Exploring London – Archive File of Group Visits

Here is a record of our Exploring London visits from November 2021 through until September 2022. For most recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

2021

October



Our group had the benefit of two crisp and bright late autumn days when we 'explored' the precincts of what would have been the medieval, pre-Great Fire, St Paul's Cathedral. Our guide Jill has taken us on London walks before, and these ones were just as interesting as her previous ventures. So many Explorers wanted to take part that we had two walks, on 25 October and 8 November, so that we could keep to a safe group size. The photo here shows the first group, maps in hand, with our guide. We're standing by the monument to the

bravery of firefighters during the Blitz, next to the City Information Centre. The full report here briefly references the Blitz and the damage to the area around the cathedral as it traces the walk route around the cathedral, stopping frequently to learn about the original street plan, walls and gateways and what can still be seen in 2021. If anyone is interested, we can share the maps we used, and the route we followed, so that you can do the walk too!

November

We finally toured the Mansion House, in the City of London, on 19 November 2021 and the popularity of this visit can be seen by the size of the group standing outside St Stephen Walbrook, the post-Great Fire Wren church next to the Mansion House. 'Exploring London' had joined the waiting list for a tour of the Mansion House in 2019 and were scheduled to visit in the week we went into the first lockdown — but we made it in the end!



The report [here](#) includes comments by group members and plenty of photographs to give a some idea of the sumptuous interiors of the 18th century building. As a bonus, most group members also had a chance to visit St Stephen's and we've included one photograph of the interior. The church is usually open during the week if one wants to visit — and indi

December



December — A group of us went along the Strand to Somerset House and the re-opened Courtauld Gallery. Based on the number of visitors in the gallery and our group's response, this is no longer going to be a 'hidden gem' among London's galleries. The collection is now hung more or less chronologically; the Impressionist paintings, for which the gallery is probably best known, are in the Great Room on the top floor, and medieval, Renaissance and 18th century paintings and other artworks and furniture are well presented in the other refurbished rooms [as the report describes](#). A notable improvement is the attempt to explain the history of the building itself, making it an ideal venue for interested 'Explorers' ... and the Courtauld's Christmas tree is a perfect way of wishing everyone the compliments of the season!

2022

January

Exploring London returned to St Paul's Cathedral on 20 and 27 January, for the first visit of 2022, to 'explore' inside, in the warm! Here's the response by one of the members of the first group, who are pictured inside the cathedral with Jill, our guide for the day: 'So great to meet outside the Cathedral without our masks, recognise friendly and familiar faces and meet some new members. Just like old times.'



Once masked up and inside, Jill conducted a fascinating tour and took us all over the beautiful place. The annual pass gives free entry any time and I've been back today for a lovely service and another look at this national treasure'. The report [here](#) incorporates reflections and some impressive photographs from both visits.

February



A return visit to the Foundling Museum on Coram Fields in Bloomsbury — most of the group are pictured outside — was prompted by an interesting temporary exhibition there, *Fighting Talk: One Boy's Journey from Abandonment to Trafalgar*. George King, the 'boy' in question, had been admitted to the Foundling Hospital in the 18th century and after an eventful life, including serving on HMS Polyphemus at the Battle of Trafalgar, had written his life story. The exhibition collected together other artefacts and

documents to give a first-hand view of the experiences of a 'foundling' which complemented the general displays in the rest of the Museum. The group's report [here](#) includes another perspective too as a long-standing Explorer had worked as a nursery nurse at the Coram Residential Nursery in 1968-1969, one of the ways in which the original aims of the Hospital's founder Thomas Coram were carried through to the 20th century. As well as an interesting visit, we found another venue for a quiet coffee and chat — the cafe of the Curzon Cinema in the Brunswick Centre!

The collections of Lambeth Palace Library have recently been relocated from the historic Palace to a specially-designed building on Lambeth Palace Road and on 23 February a group of Explorers had the chance to spend an afternoon hearing about the collections from the Librarian, touring the new building and viewing some of the extraordinary treasures it houses. The photograph taken by one of the group shows a 'Dance of Death' from a French book dated 1492, and the full report [here](#) includes more photographs and a better idea of the Library. The group photo in the report was taken in the foyer and shows one of the informative touch-tables. A group member summarised the visit as follows: 'Wonderful to share with others — meeting a group of people happy in their work — happy in their fabulous building and wanting to share their expertise'. We are very grateful to Maggie B for making the initial arrangements for this visit and — as another member wrote — we also owe 'huge thanks to Giles Mandelbrote (the Librarian) for giving us so much of his time'.



March



'Exploring London' is back on schedule, with its annual spring visit to **Two Temple Place**, on 14 March this year! The historic and impressive building itself, built in the 1890s for millionaire William Waldorf Astor, remains a draw for new and returning Explorers and this year's temporary exhibition, 'Body Vessel Clay' proved to be a unique opportunity to see works by renowned Black women potters of the 20th and early 21st centuries, together with more contemporary women ceramicists and visual artists who drew their inspiration from the medium of clay. The added 'Exploration' was to climb the steps above Temple tube station to see what can be achieved to brighten up a hitherto ignored open space — Explorers encourage you all to get up those stairs, it's all in the report [here](#)!

A highlight of any visit to the **Mansion House** in the City of London is the unexpected discovery that it houses what has been described as the 'the finest private collection of seventeenth century Dutch paintings assembled in the UK in the twentieth century'. London Explorers were so impressed when they visited in November 2021, that by popular request, a second visit to the Mansion House was arranged so that they could spend more time looking at the 84 Dutch and Flemish paintings which make up the Harold Samuel Collection. On 21 March, 20 group members went back to the City, and with the help of a specialist guide, spent well over an hour looking at the works of Frans Hals, Jan Breughel and Jan Steen among others, hung on the walls of the ceremonial rooms of the official home of the Lord Mayor of the City of London. The report [here](#) gives more information about the collection and its history — since our first visit the rules about taking photographs during the tours have been changed but luckily some of



the photographs taken last year, including this painting 'Musical Company' by Jan Steen, give a taste of the collection and will perhaps prompt other iU3A members to visit!

April



City Walk with Jill Finch: Another popular walk led by City Guide Jill Finch took London Explorers from Aldgate's St Botolph Church to the Royal Exchange near the Bank of England. We went in two groups, on 6 and 12 April, and the full report [here](#) is based on the route we all followed, with photographs by participants on both walks. As we explored the place of tea and coffee in both the economic and social/cultural life of the City of London, we walked busy main roads, past Victorian markets and stations, visited two impressive City churches (and the sites of other religious foundations) and weaved into surprisingly quiet alleyways and cul-de-sacs discovering the locations of the coffee-houses that were the foundations of iconic City establishments such as Lloyds and the Stock Exchange. There's always something to explore in the City — and in September the nursery-rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons' will be our starting point ...

May

Royal College of Music: Visitors to London are probably familiar with the imposing Victorian façade of the Royal College of Music, behind the Albert Hall on Prince Consort Road (once they've realised it's not the Royal Academy of Music on Euston Road that is!) but they may not be so familiar with the museum inside — which opened in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdowns and so got minimal publicity. As part of a Heritage Lottery funded project, the RCM's museum has been redesigned, making it much more welcoming to visitors and Exploring London headed there on a sunny May morning. Our group was limited to 15 due to the size of the museum space and the musical instruments and other artefacts on display, but after an interesting introduction to the collection, there was plenty to see as [this](#) full report with photographs shows. It's free to visit individually, and there's a pleasant cafe in a sheltered courtyard too — so we'll probably be back and would encourage others heading to 'Albertopolis' to add the museum to their itineraries!



June



Margate: for a day at the seaside! Group member Pia wrote this about the visit: 'Margate is more than sandy beaches and fish and chips or a starting point for my favourite beach walks, as I learned on our U3A visit with Rob as our guide who took us on an hour and a half walk around the town to start the day. There's also the Shell Grotto, discovered by chance by kids in 1835, with more than 4 million shells decorating its walls. Interestingly no-one knows who made it when or why. And what about Margate Caves decorated with paintings fiercely competing with Lascaux? Or even Arlington House (1964) an 18-

storey residential block designed by Philip Russell Diplock (b. 1927); it was the creation of Bernard Sunley, a property developer from Catford and more reminiscent of Benidorm where these flats were sprouting up to cater for the new mass tourism which marked the end of Margate as a popular seaside resort. To some it's a complete eyesore but we learned from our guide that they were spacious luxury flats, only eight per floor, made to the highest standard, with rooftop garden and pool, a theatre, restaurant plus 400 car garage and 50-shop mall planned as part of the scheme. It has now been listed so no chance of it being destroyed. Of course I couldn't resist a swim in the sea-pool which had nicely warmed up by 5pm when everyone else had left and I then ended up walking to Birchington-on-Sea before catching a speedy train home at 7.30pm. A perfect day trip from London.'

... and a longer report with plenty of photos is available to read [here](#).

July

Three significant London gardens: Lambeth Palace, Charterhouse and Westminster Abbey. All three have illustrious histories to discover and were looking attractive despite the stresses caused by the summer weather — we were lucky the events took place before the extreme heat of August. At Lambeth Palace the Great Hall and Chapel were also open to visit, while the evening opening of the Charterhouse was a relaxed affair with jazz music, a barbecue and a bar! The Abbey's summer openings offered small group tours led by the head gardener, highly recommended. This photo shows one of the borders at Lambeth Palace, fully blooming in early July — for more information and many more photos see the full report [here](#).



August



Explorers headed for the comfort of the air-conditioned **Guildhall Art Gallery** in the centre of the City of London. Jill Finch, our guide, gave us an introduction to the history of the gallery and its collections, and the area of Guildhall Yard, with the medieval Guildhall, St Lawrence Jewry church, and the outline of extent of the Roman amphitheatre picked out in dark grey setts. Our photo shows the first group with Jill, in the sun on 22 August (the visit was repeated on 31 August). Inside the gallery we had an informative tour round 'Inspired!', the

current temporary exhibition which focuses on the inspiration painters took from other art forms — drama, literature and music for example. But the gallery — a 'hidden gem' as Jill said — has a large permanent collection on view, and offers the chance to go right into the excavated remains of a corner of the Roman amphitheatre as well. It's open every day and is free to visit — well worth an Exploration!

September

Oranges and Lemons walk. A group of Explorers met up at the Knights Templar pub on the corner of Carey Street for another walk, expertly led by City of London guide Jill Finch. It was themed — in part — around the familiar nursery rhyme so of course it featured a visit to St Clement Danes Church in the Strand, but it encompassed so much more. We admired the Victorian architecture of the Royal Courts of Justice, gathered at the statue of Dr Johnson behind St Clement Danes, and then moved



across to Twinings shop and the mock-Tudor pub next door. Following down a narrow passage-way we were in the quiet courtyards and gardens of Inner and Middle Temple where the group learnt about the activities of the Knights Templar, and how the area now houses Temple Church and the Halls and barristers' chambers of two of the Inns of Court. We had planned to repeat this walk five days later, but the death and State Funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II made this impossible, so you will need to read the full report [here](#), with more photos, to see what we did! However, our group's schedule for 2023 looks as though it will include a further nursery-rhyme-themed walk — is everybody ready for the 'bells of St Martin's'?

See next file for October 2022 onwards.