

Exploring London – Archive File of Group Visits

Here is a record of our Exploring London visits from October 2022 through until September 2023. For most recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

2022

October



Visit to the Poppy Factory in Richmond (arranged by Pauline).

While the single poppies themselves aren't made at the site any more, the special wreaths are assembled there. The Factory has a visitors' centre where the history and manufacture of the iconic red poppy is explained by means of full displays and installations and visitors can attempt to make their own poppies — using only one hand — or try making wreaths. One group member remarked afterwards that both activities were pretty difficult — but our

photo of some of the group shows that we did manage it! There are more photographs on the report [here](#) which Pauline wrote and we're very grateful to her for setting up this October visit. As you can see, the visit did include tea and home-made cakes!

November

Abney Park Cemetery, to learn more about the cemetery and nature reserve, and especially the Common Graves project 'Abney Unearthed'. We're very grateful to Judith, who is an 'Explorer' and volunteers on the project, for making the arrangements for the group, and to Haydn who led the party on its exploration. Abney Park was one of the 'Magnificent Seven' cemeteries established in the nineteenth century to cope with the lack of space for burials in existing London cemeteries. Luckily for the group, the wet weather held off long enough for a walk through the cemetery, identifying where 'common graves' had been sited and researched: Judith's report [here](#) with photographs gives more information and shows what it looks like in a mild and wet November! For more information, go to www.abneypark.org where you can learn more about Abney Park, development plans and events and opportunities for volunteering.





Sutton House: At last, 'Exploring London' has finally caught up with all its planned pre-Covid programming. Fellow-Explorer Brenda had arranged for a guided tour of Sutton House, the NT-managed property in Hackney, before life closed down in March 2020 — and we'd even paid a deposit! Sutton House eventually re-opened for visits this year, initially for group tours only, so we were able to negotiate a date and Brenda led a group visit on

Wednesday 23 November. The guide took our group all over the house, explaining about its history and stories and pointing out the interesting features which have survived the years. The full report [here](#) tells you more about the visit, and includes several photos to give you an idea of what to expect if you visit on your own, as the house will be open again for individual visits in February 2023 after its winter clean; there are concessions for NT members and Hackney residents.

December

Royal Society: Explorers visited the Royal Society in its Carlton House Terrace headquarters on 6 December 2022, prompted by a temporary exhibition focusing on John Ruskin and his interest in contemporary scientific developments, especially 'the science of sight'. Pre-booking for groups was required as there's only a small exhibition space and, like many similar buildings, the Royal Society is heavily used for meetings and conferences.



But when we contacted them, they remembered we had previously visited in 2016 and we were offered the opportunity for a guided tour of the impressive building and a visit to the library, where several of the Society's treasures were out on display for the group. Our guide for the afternoon, the Library Manager, gave us a potted history of the Society and the building itself as we walked round, before the group spent time in the temporary exhibition at the end of the tour. If you read the report [here](#) you'll get a good idea of the visit, with more photographs — and you'll see that it looks as though we'd be welcomed back again!

2023

January & February

Exploring London started off 2023's visits programme with two opportunities to 'explore' south and north of the river! On 27 January there was a chance to visit Greenwich and see Luke Jerram's 'Museum of the Moon' installation in the Old Royal Naval College's Painted Hall. The contrast between the impressive paintings by Sir James Thornhill on the walls and ceiling of the hall and the slowly revolving globe of the moon can be seen in the photographs in the PDF of the full report of our two visits and you can see the link [here](#).

Just over a week later, on 8 February, a larger group of Explorers set off on a bright but chilly morning to the Dickens Museum in Bloomsbury. It was definitely a chilly day and for many of us, the first stop was the museum's cafe as you can see from the photo! The museum, comprising two townhouses on Doughty Street, had plenty of interest whether one is a fan of Dickens or not. The photographs in the PDF [above](#) show some of the main rooms on view in this early Victorian interior. Furniture, pictures and other artefacts from the museum's extensive collection are well-displayed and would reward return visits. One recommendation — pick a quiet time or day as the small houses can get pretty crowded when there are groups or events.



Islington's 'Exploring London' group is fortunate in having a very active member in Pauline, who moved to west London but has kept up her membership of iU3A. On 21 February she took a group of Explorers for a visit to the National Archives in Kew and nine of the group are pictured here, outside the Archive's building. The National Archives is free to visit and has a programme of temporary exhibitions, currently *Treason:*

People, Power and Plot. It's accessible by tube, Overground and SW trains from Waterloo, close to the Thames and Kew Gardens and the well laid-out grounds are proving to be a haven for bird-life, as the group spotted! There's more information on the website www.nationalarchives.gov.uk if other iU3A members fancy a trip west! See the pdf of this visit [here](#).

March



Leighton House: On a chilly and wet day, 19 Explorers, despite the weather, headed to Kensington for this visit. This photo of the exterior and hardy blossom tree was snatched between showers of rain! Leighton House, the former home of Lord Leighton, has recently reopened after a major development and refurbishment which has added a larger entrance and shop, a cafe and educational facilities to the building. Lord Leighton had bought an empty building plot in 1864 and over the next 30 years the house evolved into — as the handy guidebook says — 'a palace of art, combining domestic accommodation, a large painting studio, spaces for entertainment and a setting for his collections'. Group member and

Explorer Rachel S has written a report [here](#) in which she reflects on this visit and her previous visits to Leighton House, and additional comments by other members and a selection of photographs give a good idea what can be

expected if you visit too. Kensington's website www.rbkc.gov.uk offers an excellent introduction to Leighton House and Sambourne House and the 'Holland Park Circle' of artists who lived there in the 19th century.

The City of London's Guildhall Art Gallery:

This is currently showing a temporary exhibition of huge paintings from the City's collection — ones that are not normally on public display as they are so big that the gallery doesn't have the wall-space to hang them! The exhibition is another way to 'explore' London as the images date from the late 17th century up to the early 21st century and show how artists have responded both to events in the City and to the urban landscape of London. A group of Explorers, led by Liz (who volunteers at the gallery as well as coordinating 'Exploring London') visited on 17 March and are pictured in the temporary garden that was installed outside the Guildhall in March. As the exhibition has been extended until July, there will be another chance to visit later in the spring/summer.



March, April — Wapping: The walks that Jill Finch leads for Exploring London are always popular so we try to repeat them. Our walk around Wapping was no exception, so we had walks scheduled for 27 March and 13 April. The photo shows the March group ready to set off from outside Wapping Station. Spring weather has been variable — to say the least — but the groups were lucky, as both dates were chilly but bright and dry. The route

enabled the groups to learn a lot about the social, economic and architectural history of the area with its strong maritime and trading links. Converted factories and warehouses, docks and canals, pubs and churches all featured in the tour, though the April group were unable to visit inside St Peter's as the report [here](#) records. Happily, both groups did end their tours at the Prospect of Whitby for a well-deserved lunch! There are plenty of photographs in the full report and they may encourage more members of the Exploring London group to head to Wapping later in the year if you haven't done so before.

April

Old St Pancras Church: This visit had been organized for us by fellow-Explorer Judith Birch. When she told us about it she said that the guide who would take us round, Lester Hillman, knew a tremendous amount about the church, the surrounding churchyard and the neighbouring area of Camden — and he certainly did! It was a grey and damp morning — as you can see from this photo — to start exploring a churchyard, so the coffee and tea that was offered in the church was very welcome. The group sat comfortably



inside the church to hear Hillman's discursive presentation about the building and then moved outside to learn more about burials in the churchyard, both those which survive to the present day and those which have been moved due to the several redevelopments in the area. While the ash-tree known apocryphally as the 'Hardy Tree' had fallen in the winter of 2022, there were still a few cheerful signs of spring to come in clumps of cowslips between grave stones ... and the sun did come out as some of us continued exploring as far as the canal, Camley Street and Kings Cross. Thanks to Judith for arranging our visit, and for writing the report [here](#) too!

May & June



Covent Garden: Two groups of Explorers headed to the Covent Garden area with our guide Jill Finch, to follow the second of her popular 'Oranges and Lemons' walks, which are themed around the well-known nursery rhyme. This time we started the walks at St Martin-in-the-Fields church — 'I owe you five farthings, say the bells of St Martins' — and it was pointed out that the area around this St Martins church was such a poor one that a debt as small as 5 farthings was much more likely to be significant than in the parishes of more wealthy City churches with the same dedication. Even in such a familiar area as Covent Garden, the groups saw locations that we had never noticed before, such as what must be London's

narrowest alley, and learnt fascinating stories about street muggings, murderous actors and how not to get into one of London's newest small museums! Read the full report [here](#) for details of the walks and many more photographs taken in May and June, when the sunny weather showed London at its best ...

June

Guildhall Art Gallery: The afternoon of 14 June was very warm and sunny, so it was a pleasure to get inside for a second opportunity to catch up with the latest temporary exhibition there, *The Big City*. The run of this popular exhibition had been extended to the end of July which gave more 'Explorers' a chance to explore London in a different way — by viewing very large paintings from the City's collection which aren't normally easy to see because of their size. From Greenwich in 1678, to south London in 2013, the exhibition ranges in both time and location — and you can search for mice in surprising locations too!

This exterior photo was taken from the side of St Lawrence Jewry Church, which has recently reopened and is looking beautiful inside, across the sunny courtyard to the Guildhall Art Gallery building. The Guildhall itself is on the left — watch out for details of our proposed visit there in October as it's bound to be popular.





Oval Cricket Ground: Our Fellow-Explorer Jill L regularly goes to watch matches at the Oval ground, home of Surrey Cricket Club, and she suggested going on one of the regular tours of the ground that are offered to visitors. So a group of Explorers bought their tickets and joined a tour on 23 June — with Jill in charge! Pauline took the group photo during the tour and Angela wrote ... 'You didn't have to be a particular fan of cricket to enjoy the tour of

the grounds, although there was plenty for the true aficionados to be interested in. The actual ground, or pitch, was much more intimate than I expected and was, not surprisingly, a beautiful oval shape with of course the iconic gasometer in the background. It was easy to imagine walking down the steps into a packed ground, bat in hand, ready to score a useful set of runs or, indeed, climbing back up the steps having been bowled for a duck and having to face your team in the dressing room!'

Have a look at [the photographs that Jill and Pauline took during the visit](#) to whet your appetite for your own visit to this historic cricket ground.

July

Whitstable: The Exploring London group has established several traditions in the nearly 10 years it's been 'exploring' — and one of them is having a day trip outside London! We started quite locally with Hatfield House, but in recent years locations conveniently reached by trains from Kings Cross or St Pancras have proved popular and 2023 was no exception. Whitstable proved to be a popular destination on 6 July and all the places on our group walk



led by Rob Smith were quickly taken up. Rob's walks have always highlighted aspects of the venues that group members were unaware of — and this walk was no different. Whitstable is much more than picturesque oyster bars! We learned about early railways in the area and even earlier industries dating back to the 16th century. Even the local 'Castle' had a rather racy back story as the full report [here](#) shows. Our photo was taken by the harbour on a brief pause before group members headed off individually — some to have lunch, explore more of the town — or fit in another walk and a swim before returning to London!



RCP Gardens: The Denis Lasdun building for the Royal College of Physicians close to Regent's Park, is a 'must-see' for fans of 20-century architecture, but there's another reason to visit — so a group of Explorers (including two new members) headed there on 12 July for the last 'exploration' of the summer. The RCP boasts a medicinal garden, designed to surround the building and extend along the neighbouring Terrace and the John

Nash-designed house named after William Harvey. Like the better-known Chelsea Physic Garden, the plants in it would have been grown for medicinal purposes for hundreds, if not thousands, of years and the RCP offers expert-led group tours so that visitors can find out more. Our group was taken round by Dr Sue Burge, formerly of Oxford University; she features in a couple of our photographs in the full report [here](#) of our entertaining and illuminating tour that afternoon. You can go round the garden on your own during the week — the building and museum are also open, or book one of the regular monthly group tours — highly recommended!

August

September

On *Thursday 14 September* we headed west to Kensington to visit Kensington Palace while a temporary exhibition 'Crown to Couture' is running at the Palace (it's on until October). This major exhibition ranges through the King's and Queen's State Apartments — the photograph shows King Charles I on horseback looking down on a typical gallery! — and features an extensive collection of outfits for men and women from UK collections of historic dress and from contemporary international designers who created visually impressive 'special occasion wear'. Visitors can examine detailed embroidery and lace, shoes and corsets, learning about the rules and etiquette of court dress and can't



miss an 18th century dress with panniers which measures about 3 yards from side to side. Twentieth and twenty-first century dresses ranged from a modest white lace frock designed by Edith Head for Audrey Hepburn to stunning outfits for Beyonce and Lizzo — which were definitely not modest! This exhibition seems to have attracted different audiences to the Palace, those visitors who are interested in visiting the historic site and another group who are primarily interested in fashion and costume design — a clever bit of marketing. We had a fine afternoon to enjoy the Palace at its most attractive — and welcome afternoon tea in the café afterwards....



We began 'exploring' after the summer break with two visits in September, both attracting small groups to the events. On *Friday 1 September* the destination was Greenwich, where seasoned Explorers know there is always plenty to see! The focus for this visit was the Queen's House which has an impressive exhibition of paintings and drawings by the two eminent Dutch artists Willem van de Velde, father and son, who were invited to set up their studio in the

Queen's House by King Charles II. As a result, the Maritime Museum in Greenwich has the largest collection of sketches, drawings and paintings by the Van de Veldes outside the Netherlands and a selection were shown

throughout the Queen's House. Also on show for the first time since its conservation is a huge tapestry of the Battle of Solebay (1672) designed by Willem van de Velde the Elder – and you can see it in the photograph. The exhibition 'Greenwich, art and the sea' continues until 14 January 2024, and is well worth a visit – especially as it's free! If you go, be sure to look closely at one of the large paintings 'en grisaille' as you'll spot Van de Velde the Elder with his drawing board on knee, making sketches of the naval action taking place in front of him!

See next file for October 2023 onwards.