Adam Yamey was born in London, where he grew up, worked, and continues to dwell. He has written books on a variety of subjects, including the Balkans, Sicily, India, Poland, South Africa, and Jewish migration. He is a retired dental surgeon with an interest in history and travel. Adam was educated at University College London, where he was awarded a doctorate in physiology, and then a dental qualification. He is married and has one daughter.
WALKING

WEST

LONDON

A walker’s companion by Adam Yamey
Bedford House (detail), Chiswick Mall
Here is a book to encourage interest in walking around, and exploring, areas in west London. It highlights places which are often passed by people travelling between London’s Heathrow Airport and the city centre. It is a walker’s companion. It is partly a traveller’s handbook, partly history, and partly personal reflections and anecdotes.

This volume can be enjoyed either whilst tramping the streets of west London or lazing in a comfortable chair. I hope that my text will tempt visitors to savour this part of London, which was the city’s countryside until not so long ago. The area is rich in fascinating sights, many of them of great significance in the history of London and the rest of Great Britain.

My text contains a selection of pieces about walks and visits I have made in west London. Some of the essays describe walks that you can follow, preferably with a detailed map in your hand. Others discuss places that you can visit, but I leave it to you to find your way around. In each of the sections of this book I have tried to convey the essence of the history of the places I describe and interesting things to look out for. My aim is to give you my impressions of a selection of locations I have found enjoyable and interesting and to encourage you to visit some of them as well as making your own discoveries.

Like other great cities of the world, London evolves continuously. Much of what is now west London did not exist before the 19th century, when the western edge of the metropolis was effectively what is now Park Lane. Beyond this boundary, what is now considered ‘west London’ was a series of villages and large estates separated by countryside. Broadly speaking, I take ‘west London’ as meaning parts of the city west of Park Lane and Edgware Road, but not most of northwest London. Also, I have confined the scope of this book to London the ‘north’ side of the River Thames on which stand Westminster Abbey, Trafalgar Square, and the Tower of London.

The areas included in this volume include the following: Acton; Alperton; Bedford Park; Boston Manor; Brentford; Bushy; Chelsea; Chiswick; Ealing; Fulham; Grand Union Canal; Hammersmith; Hanwell; Holland Park; Hyde Park; Isleworth; Kensington Gardens; Kensington; Little Venice; Notting Hill; Osterley Park; Paddington; Portobello Road; River Brent; Shepherds Bush; Turnham Green; and Wembley.
What you see today might be gone tomorrow. Such is life, as my late father used to say. Some of the pieces in this volume were written during the past four years. So, please be aware that it is possible that some of the things I have described might no longer be in existence. Where I am aware of such changes, I have noted them, but I feel sure that you, dear reader, and fellow explorer, will discover where I have not remarked on changes in west London. Do let me know what changes you unearth, please. You can write to me on: aliwalthenovel@gmail.com

Note: This book has been divided into geographic sections, each containing material about interesting features to be seen. If you wish to know about a specific subject, please use the index (or the search feature if reading the e-book version of this).

Royal Crescent, Holland park Avenue

(All of the photographs in the book have been taken by its author)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**PADDINGTON … (page) 9**
The village green; Antibiotics and the gateway to the west; Worlds a part in west London; Wrecked and recovered; Books and baths, kebabs and Kapoor.

**KENSGINGTON … 27**
Wilberforce and Raffles; Organs and archaeology; Kensington and the King of the Zulus; A Kensington chapel; Peel and Flint.

**BESIDE CANAL AND RIVER … 58**
Meanwhile and Morocco; From Trellick Tower to the Fan Bridge; Legging it through the tunnel; A canal, a cricket ground, and a cruise; Mutton Brook to Brentford;

**BRENTFORD AND HANWELL … 79**
Old Brentford; Locks and lunatics.

**WEMBLEY AND ALPERTON … 86**
Soccer and samosas

**HAMMERSMITH AND CHISWICK … 96**
Hammersmith to Hogarth’s house; Dukes Meadows.

**ISLEWORTH … 114**
Holy smoke by the Thames.

**FORMER COUNTRY ESTATES … 120**
A pigeon on his head; A faded noticeboard; Strolling around the Serpentine; Art in the park; Diana and the deer; Lost his head but left a river; Town and country; Far east of Massachusetts; A surprising park and Appeasement; At home with Adam; Exotic yet near to Chiswick House.

**CHELSEA AND FULHAM … 167**
Henry VIII and his manor; Sloane ranger; From Chelsea to Chiswick House; Utopia and Worlds End; Music by the river; Turner and balloons in Chelsea; King Richard III and then More; Brompton Cemetery and an aviation tragedy; A palace for bishops.

**NOTTING HILL AND NOTTING HILL GATE … 195**
A lost tollgate; No longer a country lane (Portobello); Stepping on the past; A tragedy, a racecourse, and a republic: Notting Hill.
SHEPHERDS BUSH … 221
Oliver Cromwell, sheep, and shepherds.

ACTON … 233
Lola lived here briefly.

TURNHAM GREEN AND BEDFORD PARK … 238
Suburban dream?

INDEX … 245

Map showing approximate positions of some of the places described in the text.
Our exploration of west London starts by visiting Paddington, which was until the 19th century a small, bucolic settlement, a village, at the northwest corner of the metropolis as it was in the 18th century. Roque’s map drawn in 1746 shows the village of Paddington was reached from what was then London by a road lined on either side with fields but no houses.

I have chosen Paddington as a starting point because it is one of the places in west London closest to the old, compact metropolis before it began spreading westwards. Kensington, which I will describe later, was also close to the old London, but unlike Paddington, it was separated from the metropolis by several miles of parkland and countryside. It is hard to believe nowadays that Paddington, now a bustling, highly urbanised part of London, was once a tiny country village.

The Village Green

She sits there motionless, day after day, year after year, in all weathers, watching the traffic on the elevated section of the motorway, either rushing past or crawling along in a traffic jam. In her heyday, before being captured in stone, instead of the noise of motor vehicles, she would have enjoyed the sound of the applause given by appreciative audiences in dimly lit theatres. She was the actress Mrs Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), and her carved stone statue stands facing the Westway in Paddington Green, just west of the Edgware Road.

Paddington Green used to be a village green within an expanse of ancient rural wasteland located in an area now bounded by the Regents Canal, the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal, and Edgware Road, but now much of this land has been built upon. Writing in 1867, John Timbs noted:
“Paddington Green, now inclosed [sic] and iron-bound, was the green of the villagers, shown in all its rural beauty in prints of 1750 and 1783. Upon a portion of it were built the Almshouses, in 1714; their neat little flower-gardens have disappeared. South of the green is the new Vestry-hall. At Dudley Grove was modelled and cast, by Matthew Cotes Wyatt, the colossal bronze statue of the Duke of Wellington … it is thirty feet high, and was conveyed from the foundry, upon a car, drawn by 29 horses, Sept. 29, 1846, to Hyde Park Corner.”

Dudley Grove was in Paddington. What is now left of the wasteland consists of St Mary’s churchyard and next to it a small grassy area, still known as ‘Paddington Green’ and marked as such on a map drawn in 1815. It contains the statue of Mrs Siddons. The first written record of the Green is dated 1549. The Green contained a mediaeval chapel, now long-since gone. It has been replaced by St Mary’s Church, which was built in the Georgian style, in 1788. This was designed by John Plaw (1745-1820), who emigrated from London to the North American Colony of Prince Edward Island in 1807. His church in Paddington was later modified in the 19th century, but then restored to its original shape (a Greek Cross in plan) in 1970 under the guidance of the architect Raymond Erith (1904-1973), amongst whose other creations was former Jack Straws Castle pub, now a block of flats, in Hampstead.

The present church is the third to have been built on this site. It was halfway between the ancient villages of Paddington and Lilestone. The old Manor of Lilestone (or ‘Lilystone’), which included the present Lisson Grove and extended as far as Hampstead, lay to the east of Edgware Road and Paddington lay to the west of it. The first church was taken down in about 1678. The second church, which replaced it, can be seen in old drawings. It was a simple edifice with a single aisle and a small bell tower at one end. Edward Walford, writing in the 1880s, described it as: “… not unlike the type of country churches in Sussex…”

The poet and preacher John Donne (1572-1631) preached his first sermon in the first church in 1615 and the painter William Hogarth (1697-1764) was married to Jane Thornhill (c1709-1789), daughter of an artist James Thornhill (c1675-1734), in the second church in 1729, without her parents’ knowledge.
Next to the western end of the church there is a single-storey rectangular, brick building decorated with trompe-l’œil grisailles, one of which depicts Mrs Siddons. Today, this houses the Phileas Fox Nursery School. Built on the site of the old, now demolished, vestry hall (parish council meeting place), this building, the church hall, was designed in a late Georgian style by John Quinlan Terry (born 1937), an architect of the ‘New Classical’ style favoured by Prince Charles. It was built in 1978-81.

Apart from the statue of Mrs Siddons on Paddington Green, most of it is surrounded by buildings or roads built either at the end of the 19th century or long after. At the eastern side of the Green there is what looks like a pair of either early 19th or possibly 18th century houses. The reason Mrs Siddons is commemorated on the Green is that she is buried in the adjoining St Mary’s Churchyard. Her gravestone is contained within a cast-iron enclosure that looks like a small cage. For some time, the actress lived in Paddington in a house which used to stand in the area around Westbourne Green, which is near the Westbourne Park Underground station.

Mrs Siddons was highly acclaimed as an actress by many. The critic James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) had reservations as he remarked in his autobiography:

“Want of genius could not be imputed to … Mrs Siddons. I did not see her, I believe, in her best days; but she must always have been a somewhat masculine beauty; and she had no love in her, apart from other passions. She was a mistress, however, of lofty, of queenly, and of appalling tragic effect. Nevertheless, I could not but think that something of too much art was apparent even in Mrs Siddons; and she failed in the highest points of refinement.”

Although the poet and playwright Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), shared Hunt’s opinion about her, others held her in higher regard.

The statue of Mrs Siddon in Paddington Green was sculpted by the French sculptor Léon-Joseph Chavalliaud (1858-1919). In the 1880s, he moved to London from France and lived south of the Thames in Brixton. His Mrs Siddons, based on a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds, was unveiled by the actor Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905) in 1897. It was the first statue of a woman, who was not royalty, to be put up in London.
Paddington Green, like its close neighbour Paddington Station, figures in the history of London’s transportation. For, it was from the Green that the coachbuilder George Shillibeer (1797-1866) ran London’s first omnibus service (it went to The Bank of England) in 1829. He had got the idea from Paris, where he had been asked to design carriages that could carry up to 24 passengers at any one time.

The Paddington Green Police Station building stands a few yards east of Paddington Green. Constructed in 1971, this used to provide local policing services as well as being an interrogation centre for terrorist suspects. Persons accused, or suspected, of terrorist activities were brought here for questioning from all over the UK. Although it was refurbished in 2009, the station was closed in 2018. The building’s future is in the hands of property developers, who plan to build new housing on its site.

Until the beginning of the 19th century, Paddington Green was a bucolic environment on the edge of what was then London. Now, surrounded by buildings and highways, it is a green but noisy oasis in a highly urbanised area.
ANTIBIOTICS AND THE GATEWAY TO THE WEST

When our daughter was about 11 years old, my wife had to spend some time as an in-patient at St Marys Hospital. We used to visit her every day. To reach the hospital we walked across the concourse of Paddington Station, a London rail terminus that stands next door to the hospital. Our daughter used to be in awe of the bustling activity as we made our way through the crowds of rail travellers, travelling to and from the west of England. This elegant building was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859) and Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820-1877), who was in addition to being an architect, the Surveyor to The East India Company as well as the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cambridge. A statue of Brunel, seated with his top hat in one hand can be found on one of the platforms nearer the east side of the station. On the west side of the station, there is a war memorial as well as a statue of Paddington Bear, a fictional character created by Michael Bond (1926-2017) in 1958. The building’s design takes inspiration from Paxton’s Crystal Palace as well as the Hauptbahnhof in Munich. The present Paddington Station with its three arched glazed roofs was opened in 1854 and is truly the train passenger’s gateway to the west. When I was younger, taxis were able to drive down a ramp and onto one of the platforms in the station. The curved ramp with its iron walls painted in black still exists but is now used by pedestrians only. Today, there are taxi stands next to the station rather than within it.

Paddington Station
The station is separated from Praed Street by a large hotel, now The Hilton London Paddington. Formerly it was known as ‘The Great Western Royal Hotel’. The hotel was the brainchild of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Built in a style that vaguely alludes to the architecture of French chateaux, it was designed by Philip Charles Hardwick (1822-1892) and opened in 1854.

Paddington existed long before the station was built. As already noted, it was a rustic village close to the present Edgware Road in Middlesex at the north-western corner of London before it became part of the expanding metropolis after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Writing in his history of Paddington published in 1853, William Robins noted:

“Although the people of Paddington lived at so short a distance from … London and Westminster, they made apparently no greater advances in civilisation for many centuries than those who lived in the most remote villages in the English ‘shires. The few people who lived here were wholly agricultural …”

Until the mid to late Victorian era, the village was scantily populated. During the 18th century, the area had more than 1000 acres of grazing land. The arrival of the railway and canal did much to cause the disappearance of the bucolic nature of Paddington.

Several meanings of the name ‘Paddington’ have been suggested: ‘father’s meadow village’; ‘pack-horse meadow village’; and the most favoured is ‘village of Padda’s people’ because there are a couple of other places in England associated with a Saxon lord named ‘Padda’. King Edgar the Peaceful (c943-975) granted Paddington to the monks of Westminster in the 10th century. Oddly, the place is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, produced in 1086. In 1795, it was a settlement with about 340 houses. A map drawn in 1838 shows that most of the urbanisation of the parish of Paddington was then in its south-east corner where Edgware Road meets Bayswater Road, northwest of Marble Arch. Two factors that were significant in the urban development of Paddington were connected to transportation: the arrival of the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal, opened in 1801; and the opening of the first terminus for the Great Western Railway at Bishops Bridge Road in 1838. This was a temporary station, which was replaced by the present station on Praed Street, which is named after a banker, William Praed (1747-1833), who was one of the first directors of the Grand Junction Canal Company.
St Mary’s Hospital was inaugurated in 1851 in a building in Norfolk Place, which is one block south of Praed Street. It was the first hospital to be built in London with a medical school attached. Soon after it opened, Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), of Crimean War and nursing fame as well as a social reformer, was appointed one of its governors. In 1874, Charles Romley Alder Wright (1844-1894), a chemist and teacher at St Mary’s, became to be the first person to synthesize diamorphine (heroin).

Gradually, the demand for the hospital’s services led to its expansion. The Albert Edward Wing was opened in 1867; the Mary Stanford Wing in 1884; the Clarence Memorial Wing on Praed Street in 1904; and the architecturally undistinguished Queen Elizabeth Queen Mother Wing in 1987. The hospital also absorbed other establishments including Samaritan Hospital for Women and the Western Eye Hospital, both on the busy Marylebone Road. St Mary’s is now a part of London’s Imperial College.

The Clarence Memorial Wing of the hospital was designed by the architect Sir William Emerson (1843-1924) and is not remarkable from the aesthetic viewpoint. It certainly pales into insignificance with his best-known work, The Victoria Memorial in central Calcutta (Kolkata), constructed by 1905. He also designed Crawford Market (1869) in Bombay (Mumbai), and the Nilambag Palace in Bhavnagar (1894), a former Princely State in Gujarat (India). The latter was the Maharajah’s palace and an attractive work of architecture, now a hotel, where we have stayed. Some of these works in India were created whilst Emerson had an architectural practice in Bombay between 1864 and 1869. Aesthetic considerations aside, the Clarence Wing is of great importance in the history of medicine. It was in this building in 1928 that Sir Alexander Fleming (1881-1955) discovered what has become known as ‘penicillin’. This brilliant scientist was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1945. During his acceptance speech he spoke with some prescience:

“The time may come when penicillin can be bought by anyone in the shops. Then there is the danger that the ignorant man may easily underdose himself and by exposing his microbes to non-lethal quantities of the drug make them resistant.”

Although penicillin cannot be bought without a prescription in the UK as is possible in some other parts of the world, microbial resistance to antibiotics has become a great problem in today’s world. It has turned out that it is overuse rather than underdosage that has brought about the resistance problem.
On Praed Street, there is an entrance to the London Underground station serving Paddington Station. This station is served by the Bakerloo, Circle and District lines. Another separate Underground station within the mainline Paddington Station serves the Hammersmith and City line. The Circle and District line trains stop at one of the first of London’s Underground stations, which was originally named ‘Paddington (Praed Street)’ and was opened in 1868. The station now used by the Hammersmith and City line was opened 5 years earlier. Thus, Paddington became one of the earliest elements in what has become London’s Underground railway network.

Edgware Road, the former Watling Street, runs close to the hospital and the railway terminal. It forms the eastern edge of Paddington. Over the years, the stretch of the road that borders Paddington has had a distinctly Middle Eastern flavour. The road is richly supplied with cafés and restaurants catering to Arabic and Levantine tastes. In recent years, several fine Kurdish eateries have opened, adding to the embarrassment of choice presented to the hungry passer-by. For many years, but no longer, there used to be one of London’s few, if not only, restaurants specialising in Burmese cuisine, The Mandalay. This used to be just north of where the Westway crossed Edgware Road, but it has disappeared from this spot. It has moved northwards to Kilburn where it has taken on a new name, Mandalay Golden Myanmar Restaurant. However, if it is baklava, Arabic coffee, kofte, kibbeh, and puffing on a hookah (‘shisha’) that you are yearning for, then Edgware Road is a good place to head for.

Today, the area known as Paddington spreads west and includes Kensal Green and its fascinating cemetery, where many famous people are interred. It also contains Westbourne Grove, Bayswater, and Little Venice. The current highlights of what was once the bucolic village of Paddington are the railway terminus, the Paddington Basin, and Little Venice. The latter two places are associated with the canal network, and I will describe them later.

The part of Paddington known as Bayswater, which is bordered to the south by the northern edge of Hyde Park and to the west by Notting Hill Gate and Notting Hill, is mainly residential, but also contains numerous hotels and boarding houses. In the Victorian era, it became a popular residential area for reasonably prosperous Jewish people.
Bayswater, which began developing as a residential area as London spread westwards during the 19th century, became home for some Jewish people, who had migrated from Bloomsbury and the City of London. This relocation placed them at an inconvenient distance from the synagogues they had been used to attending. To cater for these people’s religious needs, synagogues were built in the area. The first of these, the Bayswater Synagogue, was at the corner of Chichester Place and Harrow Road and was consecrated in 1863. This building no longer exists, having been demolished when the Harrow Road flyover, a section of Westway, was built during the 1960s. The New West End Synagogue near Hyde Park on St Petersburgh Place, an offshoot of the Bayswater Synagogue, was opened in 1879 and is still used today. Designed by the architects George Audsley (1838-1925) and Nathan S Joseph (1834-1909), it can accommodate about 800 people.

New West End Synagogue, Bayswater
The ‘posher’ Jewish people in west London tended to live around Bayswater in years gone by. These prosperous members of the Jewish community arrived in Bayswater in the 19th century as the district began to be urbanised. At first sight, you might easily be mistaken for thinking that the huge red brick building (on St Petersburgh Place) with its Victorian gothic architectural features, a rose window, and twin bell towers, is a church. And maybe that was the intention of the community that commissioned the building. Upwardly mobile Jewish people in Victorian England might well have preferred not to advertise their religious beliefs too much in a society that then had many prejudices against Judaism and other non-Christian religions.

The synagogue in St Petersburgh Place looks no more exotic or out of place than the Church of St Matthew a few yards north on the same street. In fact, it is another building to the north of these two and within sight of them that is unashamedly exotic in appearance: Aghia Sofia, the Greek Orthodox cathedral on Moscow Road, which was consecrated only three years after the synagogue. Moscow Road is named after the present capital of Russia and St Petersburgh Place after its former capital. They are close to the gravel pits owned by the publisher and property developer Edward Orme (1775-1848), who made money by selling gravel to Russia. The roads might have received their names in 1814 when Tsar Alexander I visited England. Orme Square, which is adorned with a pillar bearing the sculpture of an eagle, but not the Russian double-headed version, is nearby on Bayswater. A building on the corner of St Petersburgh Place and Moscow Road bears several sculpted cows’ heads. This was formerly the main branch of The Aylesbury Dairy, and has recently (2021) become a café.

The desire of some wealthier Jewish people to ‘melt’ seamlessly with British ‘high society’ was not shared by all of London’s Jewish folk. Less prosperous Jews moved to crowded Notting Hill, rather than the more salubrious Bayswater. During the last few decades of the Victorian era, large numbers of Jewish people began arriving in London from Eastern Europe, and many of them settled in the crowded East End. In 1902, A Jewish Dispersion Committee, set up by the (Jewish) banker and philanthropist Sir Samuel Montagu (1832-1911), tried to attract some of these new arrivals to settle in areas away from the East End, like Notting Hill.
If we move less than a mile northwest of St Petersburgh Place to reach the northern end of Kensington Park Road, close to Portobello Road, in nearby Notting Hill, we reach the site of another (now disused) synagogue. This building, still standing but now repurposed, was not designed to mislead the onlooker into believing it was a church, as was The New West End Synagogue. The former Notting Hill Synagogue at numbers 206/208 Kensington Park Road was opened in 1900, a little ahead of the formation of the above-mentioned Dispersion Committee. It was worth opening it because there was a sufficient Jewish presence in the neighbourhood. By 1905, it had 281 members and ten years later, there were 250. Its ritual was Ashkenazi Orthodox, the same as that at the New West End Synagogue, but the congregants were less wealthy than those who attended the latter. Many of them were market stallholders or artisans, such as tailors and shoemakers. They lived in, what were at the beginning of the 20th century, less desirable dwellings than those of the folk, who worshipped in St Peterburg Place. Although I do not know for certain, I doubt there was much socialising between the Jewish communities of Bayswater and Notting Hill.

The Notting Hill Synagogue was housed in a former church hall. Its memorial stone, dated the 27th of January 1900, was laid by Sir Samuel Montagu. Although it was a discreet building externally, its interior with galleries for the women and girls was elaborate and attractive as can be seen in old photographs. We had walked past it many times without realising it was once a place of worship until a friend told us recently about its former incarnation. If you look carefully, you can spot the six-pointed Star of David on some of the building’s first floor windows. Although they have been painted over, they can still be discerned.

During WW2, the synagogue was severely damaged by a German bomb. It was restored and reconstructed. During the Notting Hill race riots in the late 1950’s, when the fascist Oswald Mosley (1896-1980) was campaigning as a candidate in the election for the parliamentary seat of the local constituency, Kensington North, he set up his office close to the synagogue. On the 31st of January 1959, one of his supporters daubed the synagogue with the words used by the Nazis: “Juden raus”. Despite these traumatic events, the synagogue continued to thrive until the 1990s, by which time the size of the local Jewish population had declined. Rabbi Pini Dunner (born 1970), who had been invited to help in performing the ritual in 1992, when the synagogue, under the leadership of its charismatic Stuart Schama, was falling into decline, wrote:
“Notting Hill Synagogue was nothing like any shul I had ever seen. The congregants consisted of a motley group of mainly octogenarian men, characters out of some East End Jewish sit-com, each with his own catchphrase, many of them not quite sure why they were there week after week.”

The synagogue closed, and amalgamated with the Shepherd's Bush, Fulham & District Synagogue. Since its closure, the synagogue has been used as a ‘health club’. Currently (March 2021), the building bears the name ‘Teresa Tarmey’, a company that supplies various ‘treatments’. The transformation of the former synagogue into a trendy beauty salon reflects that of Notting Hill from a relatively impoverished area into a prosperous area with high property prices, which is beginning to make Bayswater seem less attractive in comparison. The synagogue in St Petersburg Place continues to thrive. One of my cousins, who lives many miles from it, told me that it was well worth travelling to because members of its congregation, most of whom live far from Bayswater, are vibrant and life-enhancing, which is good to know because the mainly residential area surrounding the synagogue is usually rather sleepy.

Next, we visit a place in the northern part of Paddington.
Paddington Recreation Ground, located between West Kilburn and St John’s Wood, was formally established in 1893. It was London’s first public athletic ground. From 1860 to 1893, it was a parish cricket ground. In 1888, a cricket pavilion was constructed. It is now named after Richard Beachcroft who was Secretary of the cricket club in the 1880s. Also in 1888, the grounds were opened to public access and a cycle track was laid out, which remained in existence until 1987 when the position of the cricket pitch was moved. In 1893, the Paddington Recreation Act was passed, authorising:
“…the formal acquisition of lands in the Parish of Paddington to ‘provide the residents with a public recreational ground’.”

In 2006, the grounds were completely refurbished by Westminster City Council. The centrally located cricket pitch and its Victorian pavilion are now surrounded by a children’s playground; tennis courts; an outdoor gymnasium; a running track; hockey pitches; a bandstand; a bowling green; and various fenced off enclosures containing gardens and an ‘environmental area’. The pleasant park with its café and other facilities covers 27 acres and is well used by locals.

The Paddington Recreation Ground was a place where two world famous sportmen trained. One was the professional road and track cyclist Sir Bradley Marc Wiggins (born 1980), who won the Tour de France in 2009. He learned to ride a bicycle in the grounds. He attended the St Augustine’s Church of England School nearby. The other sportsman was a medical student at the nearby St Marys Hospital when he trained on a running track at the Recreation Grounds. On the 6th of May 1954, he became the first man to run a mile in under 4 minutes. This man was Sir Roger Bannister (1929-2018).

The Recreation Ground has several entrances. One of these is a short path leading from Carlton Vale. It runs past a pub called ‘The Carlton Tavern’, which has a curious recent history. In 1918, a German bomb destroyed a pub that stood on this site. In 1921, this was replaced for the Charrington Brewery by a newer building designed by Frank J Potter (1871-1948), who also designed the observatory in Hampstead. During WW2, the pub was the only building in the street not to have been destroyed during The Blitz.
This plucky little pub’s luck ran out in 2015. That year, developers bought the Tavern with a view to demolishing it to create space to build luxury flats. A week before the pub was due to become a protected historical edifice, the developers, no doubt having learned what was in the offing, reduced it to rubble. They hoped that they would get away with it, possibly being fined an amount, which they could easily recoup when they sold the luxury accommodation they were planning to build. Things did not work out in their favour. Local action groups fought for the pub’s reconstruction and won. The courts ordered the developers to reconstruct the pub brick-by-brick. They did a good job, and today it looks much as it did before it was hurriedly demolished.

Both the pub and the Recreation Ground stand in the shadow of the tall tower of the Anglo-Catholic Church of St Augustine. Known as ‘the cathedral of north London’, the church was designed in the gothic revival style by John Loughborough Pearson (1817-1897), who also designed the superb Truro Cathedral in Cornwall. The church was consecrated in 1880, but the tower and spire were not completed until 1897-98. I have never been inside this building, but have seen photographs of its interior, which looks magnificent.
The places described above are almost all that remains of an area which has been subject to much rebuilding since WW2. Visiting them can make an interesting detour when walking near Little Venice along the Paddington Arm (branch) of The Grand Union Canal. I doubt that I would have visited the Recreation Grounds had I not been alerted to it and encouraged to pay it a visit by two sets of friends, to whom I am grateful.

Before moving far away from Paddington, I will tell you about a short street, which I enjoy visiting. However, it is not within Paddington but right next to it. Although it runs east of Edgware Road and might not strictly fall into my definition of west London, the short Bell Street has much of the ‘vibe’ of Paddington.

BOOKS AND BATHS, KEBABS AND KAPOOR

It is unlikely that I would have become familiar with Bell Street had it not been for the presence of the Lisson Grove Gallery, which is housed in two buildings along it. We were first attracted to the gallery when it was showing one of its many exhibitions of works by the sculptor Anish Kapoor (born 1954 in Bombay, India). Bell Street currently connects Edgware Road, the Roman ‘Watling Street’, with Lisson Grove. In former times, Bell Street was shorter, only running between Edgware Road and Lisson Street. It continued to Lisson Grove under other names. In 1930, it was continued as ‘Bendall Street’, and before that, as seen in 1901 and 1820 maps, as ‘Great James Street’. Bendall Street became part of Bell Street sometime between 1929 and 1945.

In 1820, Bell Street, named after the nearby Bell Field, was on the very edge of London, bordering open countryside. Soon after this, built-up London spread beyond it. The street was not in a prosperous area.

The theatrical impresario and writer John Hollingshead (1827-1904) noted in his “Ragged London in 1861”:
“This is the side of Lisson Grove which is supposed to contain the decent poor; and on the other side, in the streets leading into the Edgeware Road, is a more densely crowded and even lower population. Bell Street, now famous in history as the spot where Turkish baths were first established, is the main stream of a low colony, with many tributary channels. There is no particular manufacture in the neighbourhood to call the population together; a great number are not dependent upon St. John's Wood or the Regent's Park for a living; and they come together simply because they like the houses, the rents, the inhabitants, and the general tone of living in the settlement …The Christ Church division of Marylebone, in which Bell Street and all its ramifications stand, is watched over by the Rev. Llewellyn Davies. The whole population of this crowded district is estimated at thirty thousand, and it embraces the worst part of the parish. The parochial work in such an area, which contains at least sixteen thousand idle and industrious poor, is necessarily very heavy....”

The Turkish baths in Bell Street were the first such establishment in London. They were opened in July 1860 by Roger Evans, who had suffered from ‘neuralgia’ for many years. Dr RH Goolden (of St Thomas’s Hospital) wrote in “The Lancet”, a leading medical journal:

“For some time I watched the effect of the bath in Bell-street … and I went into the bath at such times as that I could observe its effects upon the lower classes, who resorted there in great numbers, not as a luxury, but as a remedy, as they supposed, for disease; and I consider, however much anyone may sneer at my occupation, I could not be better engaged than amongst these people, and studying so interesting a subject, even at some inconvenience. There were often ten people in the hot room at one time, all invalids, and I found them quite willing to tell me all their complaints, and to let me examine them. They were principally artizans, small shopkeepers, policemen, admitted at a small fee. I saw there cases of fever, scarlatina, phthisis, gout ....”

The baths no longer exist. Various sources state that they were at number 5 Bell Street. Today, numbers 3 to 5 are occupied by the premises of the Belle Boucherie, a halal butcher’s shop that sells superb marinated chicken. If the street numbering is still the same as it was in 1860, then there is no visible trace of the baths. Its neighbouring shops cater to locals including a thriving Arabic speaking community.
Edgware Road Underground Station on the Metropolitan Line marks the beginning of my tour of Bell Street and its environs. Just outside the station, there is a statue of a man, a window cleaner, carrying a ladder. Called “The Window Cleaner”, it was sculpted by Allan Sly (born 1951) in 1990. The window cleaner is depicted looking up in dismay at a nearby skyscraper with its sea of glass windows. To reach Bell Street, it is necessary to walk under the Marylebone Flyover, which carries the A40 over Edgware Road. Constructed in the 1960s, this was opened in 1967 by Desmond Plummer (1914-2009), a Conservative politician and the longest serving Leader of the Greater London Council. At the time of writing this (2021), the brutalist nature of the concrete bridge has been modified by elaborate graffiti representing trees and birds.

Immediately north of the flyover, the southern wall of the building that contains Edgware Road Bakerloo Line Station is covered by a riot of greenery, a vertical garden. Known as the ‘Green Wall’, it was designed by a company called Biotecture. Installed in 2011, the wall, measuring 180 square metres, contains “14,000 plants of 15 different species”, and, apart from looking beautiful, it helps purify the air.

The Bakerloo Line Station, which dates to 1907, has some art-nouveau ironwork above its main entrance. Originally, the station had an exit in Bell Street, but this was closed a long time ago. The building that contains this former exit contains offices used by the station’s staff. These offices are almost opposite the Belle Boucherie, mentioned above. Close to the butcher, but further away from Edgware Road, there is a slightly scruffy looking (but clean) eatery called ‘Ahl Cairo’. Do not be put off by its appearance. This friendly café/restaurant serves superbly prepared Egyptian food. I have not explored the whole of its menu, but can safely recommend the following, which I have enjoyed: mutabel, tabbouleh, aubergine and pepper salad, falafel, fried liver, shish kofte, and the sweet dessert fittir (looks like a pizza, but much more delicate and far lighter), not forgetting lovely mint tea and Arabic coffee.

The Egyptian restaurant occupies part of the ground floor of one of the three Miles Buildings. These were built in 1885 by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, founded by the philanthropist Sydney Waterlow (1822-1906) in 1863. The company aimed to build housing for workmen and the poor displaced from slums that were demolished during railway construction works. Waterlow did not employ an architect. He designed the buildings himself. According to a history of the Waterlow family:
“The construction was novel, using concrete floors and roofs, virtually fireproof and well ventilated for health reasons; there were self-contained toilet and washing facilities, open balconies and the staircases were outside. Pompous architects criticised him on the fairly trivial grounds that “coffins could not easily be gotten down the staircases”.

The three blocks of Miles Buildings can be viewed well from the corner of Bell Street and Corlett Street.

Further east along this same side of Bell Street, the northern pavement of what used to be called ‘Great James Street’, you will come across one of the most wonderful second-hand bookshops in London, one of my favourites in the world, Archive Bookstore (established in 1971). Several untidy tables and boxes laden with second-hand books stand under a blue awning on the pavement outside the narrow shopfront. Stepping through the door, you enter an Aladdin’s Cave crammed full of books in apparent disorder. It is adorned with quirky decorations, as well as the odd musical instrument. Often, the shop’s affable owner, Tim, will be surrounded by his friends who come in to chat with him and enjoy cups filled with tea or sherry. Tim knows his stock well and is happy to discuss almost anything with you. The store is packed with books covering a wide range of subjects and is a particularly good place to find musical scores.

For me, Archive is the main attraction of Bell Street, but it is the Lisson Gallery that attracts most visitors. According to their website:

“Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world.”

It was founded in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, and now has branches in London, Milan, and New York City. The branches in London are both on Bell Street. One of them entered from that street and the other, which has a frontage on the street, is entered from Lisson Street. The latter branch is next to a currently disused pub, the ‘Brazen Head’, which was closed in 2015. The two branches of the Bell Street gallery offer spaces of varying sizes for displaying art works. The spaces are sparsely decorated with white walls and good lighting.

Bell Street, which looks quite insignificant on the maps, is far more interesting that it might seem at first sight. It is a good place to linger and enjoy even though it is not quite in what I have loosely defined as ‘west London’.
Now let us move southwest from Paddington to Kensington, another former village west of the old London metropolis.

Figures facing the churchyard of St Mary Abbot, Kensington

KENSINGTON

Before the late 18th century, Kensington was the first village a traveller would have encountered after leaving Mayfair or Westminster. These travellers would have used one of two roads that used to run through the park. However, before I describe features of Kensington itself, I will tell you about Kensington Gore, a short stretch of road running along the south side of Hyde Park on the way to Kensington from what used to be the western edge of the metropolis.
A ‘gore’ is a narrow wedge-shaped piece (or narrow slip) of land. Kensington Gore stretches west from Exhibition Road to Queen’s Gate and its major landmark is currently the Royal Albert Hall, but this has not always been the case. The wedge-shaped land, the Gore south of Hyde Park, which can be seen marked on an early 19th century map, was then an enclave of land owned by the Parish of St Margaret Westminster that lay between the King’s Private Road in royal Hyde Park and the thoroughfare currently called Kensington Gore and Kensington Road.

Bear with me because my story begins far away from Kensington Gore in Mill Hill, once a village, and now a suburb, in north London.

WILBERFORCE AND RAFFLES

The Ridgeway in Mill Hill, with spectacular views over north London and the nearby countryside from each side of it, is a pleasant place to wander. St Pauls Church is a simple Gothic revival edifice that stands on The Ridgeway. The church has a plaque attached to it, which informs the viewer that it was built by the anti-slave-trade activist and politician William Wilberforce (1759-1833), consecrated in 1833, and became a parish church in 1926. While we were looking at the plaque, a cleric arrived by car, unlocked the church, and invited us inside. We asked him about Wilberforce and his connections with Mill Hill. He told us that the great abolitionist had lived in Mill Hill and was for a short while the neighbour of his friend Sir Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), who is remembered for his ‘founding’ of Singapore.

Wilberforce and Raffles were neighbours at Highwood Park (on Highwood Hill), 1100 yards northwest of St Pauls. William Hague, politician, and author of a biography of William Wilberforce (first published in 2008), wrote that when the abolitionist moved into his new home in Mill Hill on the 16th of June 1826, Wilberforce wrote: “I shall be a little zemindar, one hundred and forty acres of land, cottages of my own, etc.”
By ‘zemindar’, he was referring to ‘zamindar’, the Hindustani word meaning ‘landowner’. Wilberforce’s neighbour, Raffles, was already installed at Highwood Park when the abolitionist moved next door. Raffles wrote of his home there (quoted in “Handbook to the Environs of London” by James Thorne [publ. 1876]):

“A happy retirement … a house small but compact … Wilberforce takes possession tomorrow of the next-door house so that we be next-door neighbours and divided the hill between us.”

Sadly, Raffles died on the 5th of July 1826, shortly after his friend Wilberforce moved on to Highwood Hill. All of this is quite interesting, I hear you saying whilst wondering what it has got to do with west London.

Well, now I will tell you.

Before moving to Mill Hill, Wilberforce had lived for some time in Kensington Gore. His home from 1808 to 1821 was Gore House, built in the 1750s and set in three acres of grounds, which extended south from the Gore. It had interiors designed by the Scottish-born architect Robert Adam (1728-1792), whom you will meet often in this volume. Sadly, it was demolished and eventually replaced by the Royal Albert Hall (designed by Captain Francis Fowke [1823-1865] and Major-General Henry Young Darracott Scott [1822-1883] and constructed between 1867 and 1871; its dome was designed by Rowland Mason Ordish [1824-1886]). This magnificent circular concert hall, built during the golden days of the British Empire, occupies the site of the house and its grounds. Writing in the 1880s, Edward Walford quoted Wilberforce as having written of Gore House:

“We are just one mile from the turnpike at Hyde Park Corner, having about three acres of pleasure-ground around our house, or rather behind it, and several old trees, walnut and mulberry, of thick foliage. I can sit and read under their shade with as much admiration of the beauties of nature as if I were down in Yorkshire, or anywhere else 200 miles from the great city.”

Wilberforce’s home on the Gore was one of several grand houses facing that thoroughfare and the expanse of Hyde Park across it. Others included Kingston House and Rutland House, both of which have been demolished.
Highwood Hill on the edge of London would have provided the ageing Wilberforce with what he had enjoyed at Gore House but without being so close to the bustle of London life. Wilberforce felt that there was one disadvantage of Mill Hill when he moved there in 1826. The problem was that the nearest church, the parish church at Hendon, was three miles away. In Spring 1828, Wilberforce spent two months in London during which he approached the Church Commissioners regarding establishing a new church near his home in Mill Hill. At first, his plans for the church were welcomed by Theodor Williams, the Vicar of Hendon, who was unsympathetic to the anti-slavery movement. However, once the construction of the chapel, the present St Pauls on the Ridgeway, began, Williams reacted vigorously against the idea. Hague is not certain what caused this change of heart on Williams’ part. One reason might have been that there was an Act of Parliament that allowed the founder of a new church to select and appoint its vicar. Another was that Williams was known not to like the Evangelicals, which included Wilberforce and other promoters of the abolition of slavery. Despite the difficulties raised by the Vicar of Hendon, the chapel was built, but remained a chapel rather than a parish church until 1926.

Before we proceed west to Kensington proper, be patient because there is another interesting place along the Gore. Unlike the former Gore House, it is still in existence and unlike its neighbour, the Royal Albert Hall it is less noticed by visitors to the area.
ORGANS AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Most visitors to Kensington Gore are attracted to the spectacular Royal Albert Hall and, opposite it, the monument to Albert, Queen Victoria’s consort. Immediately to the west of the Royal Albert Hall, there stands the comparatively less impressive twentieth century building housing the Royal College of Art (‘RCA’), opened in 1962. It was designed by Henry Thomas Cadbury-Brown (1913-2009), whose work was influenced (not too positively in the case of the RCA) by Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. On the south side of this geometric structure of concrete and glass there is an edifice whose appearance is a dramatic contrast to it. The walls of the RCA’s southern neighbour are covered with figurative illustrations, created in the ‘sgraffito’ technique. Bands of ‘putti’ carrying musical instruments, clasping scrolls of paper, or singing, appear to be scurrying across the walls of the building. Maybe this is not surprising because once this place first housed a music school before it became home to The Royal College of Organists (‘RCO’).
Founded in 1864 by the organist Richard Limpus (1824-1875) to promote advanced organ playing, the RCO received its Royal Charter in 1893. Its building was designed by Lieutenant Henry Hardy Cole (1843-1916) of the Royal Engineers, and the ‘sgraffito’ decorating it was created by Francis Wallaston Moody (1824-1886). Moody was a protégé of Sir Henry Cole (see below) and a teacher at the National Art Training School, a forerunner of the RCA.

Lieutenant Cole was a son of Sir Henry Cole (1808-1882), a civil servant who had an extremely important role in organising the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was held in the section of Hyde Park lining the north side of Kensington Gore. The Lieutenant’s building, erected 1874-75, was originally constructed to house The National Training School for Music. It was paid for by Sir Henry Cole’s friend, music lover, and a fellow member of the Society of the Arts, the developer Charles James Freake (1818-1884), who lived in Cromwell Road. Lieutenant Cole had little practical architectural experience as is revealed in “The Survey of London Vol. 38”.

He had just:
“… returned in 1871 from India, where he had been Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey, North-West Provinces, and his previous architectural work seems to have been confined mainly to publications on ancient Indian architecture and archaeology, and the preparation of casts for the Indian section of the South Kensington Museum, which he catalogued.”

Consequently:
“He was not left to design the school on his own. It was evolved in consultation with his father and was subjected to criticism by members of the Science and Art Department. A committee of management was appointed in July 1873 …”

The large variety of musical instruments that are depicted on the building’s walls reflect the place’s first occupants. Between 1883 and 1896, it was used by the newly founded Royal College of Music, which moved into its new and much larger premises in about 1896. Since then, the music school has been on Prince Consort Road, facing the south side of the Royal Albert Hall. Between 1896 and 1903, it stood empty. Then it was leased to the RCO for 100 years at a ‘peppercorn’ rent. When it was learnt that after expiry of the lease the rent would be increased considerably, the RCO moved into new accommodation in 1991. By 2018, it was owned by an entrepreneur, Robert Tchenguiz.
Lieutenant Cole, who designed the sgraffito-covered building, became the Curator of Ancient Monuments in India. His “First Report Of The Curator Of Ancient Monuments In India” was published in 1882 in Simla. This contains some of his views on dealing with archaeological items and sites. For example, he wrote:

“Experience has shown that the keenest investigators have not always had the greatest respect for the maintenance of monuments. Archaeological research has for its object the elucidation of history, and to an enthusiast the temptation to carry off a proof of an unravelled mystery is undoubtedly great. If there were no such things as photographs, casts, and other means of reproducing archaeological evidence, the removal of original stone records might perhaps be justified …”

Regarding the now controversial British possession of some famous sculptures in the British Museum, he wrote:

“Sometimes, indeed, the removal of ancient remains is necessary for safe custody; and in the case of a foreign country, we are not responsible for the preservation in situ of important buildings. We are not answerable for keeping Grecian marbles in Greece; neither were we concerned for the rights of Egypt when Cleopatra’s Needle left Alexandria for the Thames embankment.”

However, regarding India, the Lieutenant wrote:

“In the case, however, of India—a country which is a British possession—the arguments are different. We are, I submit, responsible for Indian monuments, and that they are preserved in situ, when possible. Moreover, as Mr. Fergusson remarks, Indian sculpture is so essentially a part of the architecture with which it is bound, that it is impossible to appreciate it properly without being able to realise correctly the position for which it was originally designed …”

To satisfy the needs of museums in Europe, the lieutenant suggested that perfect replicas of artefacts could be made. This is well demonstrated by the superb life-size plaster casts that can be seen in the Cast Courts of South Kensington’s Victoria and Albert Museum, which were opened in 1873 and established by Sir Henry Cole and the art collector John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) and are well worth visiting. In general, Sir Henry’s son was against moving historical remains from British possessions. To make his point, he wrote:
“The removal, for instance, of Stonehenge to London would, I imagine, provoke considerable excitement in England, and be condemned by a majority in the scientific and artistic world.”
I am not sure that Lieutenant Cole’s views were shared by the American sculptor and collector of antiques George Grey Barnard (1863-1938), who bought whole cloisters and other architectural items in France and then had them shipped to New York City. There, they were reassembled and displayed in the wonderful Cloisters Museum at the northern tip of Manhattan.

Looking at the outside of the former RCO building, I could not detect anything that reflected its architect’s experiences in India except, if I stretch my imagination, the upper storey windows that faintly recall the projecting windows that can be found on ‘havelis’, for example, in Gujarat and Rajasthan. But maybe I am letting my imagination run a little wild.

Now, we will move west from Kensington Gore and into Kensington itself. I have lived in Kensington for over twenty-five years, yet hardly knew its fine history until I walked, with eyes wide open, along the route that is described next. I have divided it into two sections.
Part 1: From The Swan to the roof garden

Roque’s map, drawn in the early 1740s, shows that Kensington was then a small village separated from the western edge of London (marked by the present Park Lane) by open country (Hyde Park and the grounds of Kensington Palace). It lay on The Great West Road, a turnpike (toll) road leading from the city to Brentford and much further west. In Roque’s time, Kensington was separated from the next settlement to the west of it, Hammersmith, by agricultural land with very few buildings.

The name ‘Kensington’ appeared in the Domesday Book as ‘Chenisitum’, which is based on the name of a person who held a manor in Huith (Somerset) during the reign of Edward the Confessor (ruled 1042-1066). During the 17th century, large houses such as Kensington Palace and the now demolished Campden and Holland Houses were established in Kensington and needed people to service and protect them. This and the fact that it was on the busy Great West Road must have influenced the growth and importance of the village.

Being close to the ‘Great Wen’ as William Cobbett (1763-1835), a great advocate of the countryside, rudely described London, yet separated from it, Kensington attracted people, including many artists, to live there, especially in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. During the 18th century, reaching Kensington from London, only four miles from the city’s Temple Bar, was not without danger, as highwaymen operated in Hyde Park.
This exploration begins close to Notting Hill Gate Underground station, at the northern end of Church Street, which in the 1740s led from the Kensington Gravel Pits (now, Notting Hill Gate), which lined the northern edge of Bayswater, to the centre of Kensington Village. Today, the road follows the same winding course as it did in the 18th century. Close to the Post Office is the Old Swan Pub, where it is said that both Christopher Wren and King William III drank in one of its earlier reincarnations. Next to it, there is an alleyway decorated with mosaic tiling designed by pupils of the nearby Fox Primary School. The pupils of this school have also created attractive mosaics on the outside of their school, which is located at the eastern end of a cul-de-sac called Edge Street, which leads off Church Street.

Just south of some of the numerous antique dealers’ shops that line Church Street, there is an 18th century house where the Italian-born composer Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) lived for many years. Nearby, is the colourful, exuberantly adorned, plant-covered, much photographed, Churchill Arms pub, which was established in the mid-18th century. It offers Thai food and attracts many tourists. South of it, a tree on the corner of Church Street and Berkeley Gardens is labelled with a small plaque stating that it was brought from Kensington in Maryland (USA) in 1952.

A large brick-built block of flats on Sheffield Terrace is named Campden House. This and Campden House Close, which leads off Hornton Street, are reminders that they were built on the extensive grounds of the former Campden House, which was built about 1612. An illustration published by The Reverend Lyson in 1795 shows that this was a fine building rivalling places such as Hatfield House. Sadly, it was demolished in about 1900.

Just before Hornton Street reaches the Town Hall and Library, it meets Holland Street. A small building on the corner was once the home of the composer Charles Stanford (1852-1924) between 1894 and 1916. Its drainpipe is embellished with two small bas-reliefs of animals. I wonder whether Stanford ever bumped into the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957), who lived close by in Gloucester Walk during 1909. Opposite Stanford’s house stands number 54 Hornton Street, which used to be number 43. The ‘43’ remains on the building but has been struck out with a line.
Holland Street is full of treats. Number 37 was home to the lesbian novelist Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943) between 1924 and 1929. It is worth wandering along the picturesque cobbled Drayson Mews before returning to Holland Street. This used to contain a series of premises belonging to a commercial dealer in Jaguar cars. The dealership is no longer there.

The popular Victorian Elephant and Castle pub on Holland Street is opposite a delightful cul-de-sac, Gordon Place, which is overhung with vegetation growing in the gardens lining it. The pub bears a large picture of an elephant with a castle on its back. This closely resembles part of the coat of arms of the Worshipful Company of Cutlers and has little, if anything, to do with the Elephant and Castle district in south London, whose name is a corruption of the Spanish ‘La Infanta de Castilla’.

The artist Walter Crane (1845-1915), who collaborated with William Morris, lived in number 13 Holland Street from 1892 onwards. This house is opposite number 12, the street’s oldest surviving building, which was built about 1730. It was constructed on the site of a ‘dissenting house’, which had been built in 1725. The narrow partly covered Carmel Court next to number 12 leads to the south side of the Catholic Carmelite monastery (Victorian) and its newer Church (built between 1954 to 1959 and designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott [1880-1960]). The name of its neighbour on Church Street, Newton Court, recalls that in 1725 the scientist Isaac Newton (1643-1727) lived somewhere close-by.

In the last year of his life, Newton lived and died at Orbell’s Buildings, which is now demolished but stood roughly where Newton Court and Bullingham House stand today. It was here that Newton is supposed to have first told his story about the falling apple. He related it to the physician and antiquary William Stukely (1687-1765) on the 15th of April 1726. In his “Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton's Life”, Stukely recalled this occasion in Kensington:

“The weather being warm, we went into the garden and drank tea, under shade of some apple-trees, only he and myself. Amidst other discourses, he told me, he was just in the same situation, as when formerly, the notion of gravitation came into his mind. It was occasion'd by the fall of an apple, as he sat in contemplative mood. Why should that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground, thought he to himself. Why should it not go sideways or upwards, but constantly to the earth's centre.”
The Carmelite monastery stands in part of what had been Newton’s Garden. Returning via Church Street to Holland Street, there is a Lebanese restaurant on the corner. This is housed in what had been the Catherine Wheel pub until 2003. Lovers of art-deco architecture can admire the nearby block of flats, Winchester Court, that sits on the corner of Church Street and Vicarage Gate. It was designed by Donald Frank Martin-Smith (1900-1984) and built in 1935.

The lower end of Church Street is dominated by the tall spire of St Mary Abbots Church. The present building, a Victorian gothic structure, was built in the early 1870s to the designs of Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878; grandfather of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott), who died in Kensington. A covered passageway leads from the war memorial and flower stall, both at the corner of Church Street and High Street Kensington, to the church’s western entrance. The church’s spacious and lofty interior is grand but not exceptionally attractive.

To the south of the path leading to the church, there is a Victorian gothic school building, part of St Mary Abbots Primary School. This school was founded nearby in 1645. In about 1709, it was housed in two buildings on the High Street, where later the old Kensington Town Hall was built (it was demolished in 1982 and replaced by a non-descript newer version on Hornton Street). High on the wall of the Victorian school building, facing the church, there are two sculptured figures wearing blue clothing: a boy and a girl. These used to face the High Street on the 18th century building. The boy holds a scroll with the words: “I was naked and ye clothed me” (from Matthew in the New Testament). The school continues to thrive today.

Walk through the peaceful St Mary Abbots Gardens – once a burial ground (and in the 1930s, also the site of a coroner’s court), and you will soon reach a wonderful Victorian gothic/Tudor building on the busy High Street. Faced with red bricks and white stonework, this was built as the local ‘Vestry Hall’, where officials deliberated on matters of local importance, in 1852. It was designed by James Broadbridge. From 1889 to 1960, it housed Kensington Central Library, which is now located in a newer, less decorous, building in Hornton Street. The former Vestry Hall is now home to an Iranian bank. Incidentally, there are many Iranian people living in Kensington, many of them having fled their country when the Shah’s regime fell in the 1970s.
Lovers of art-deco architecture need only turn their backs on the old Vestry Hall to behold two satisfying examples of that style. They used to house two department stores: Derry and Toms built in 1933; and Barker’s (built in the 1930s). Barker’s company took over its rival Derry and Tom’s. Both replaced older buildings. They were designed by Bernard George (1894-1964) and are covered with a great variety of art-deco ornamentations.

The Derry and Toms building has a wonderful roof garden, The Kensington Roof Gardens, which was opened in 1938. It has a restaurant open to the public. In the early 1970s, the Derry and Toms building briefly housed the then extremely trendy Biba store, the inspiration of Polish-born Barbara Hulanicki (born 1936). Now, there are various retail stores using the ground floors of these two buildings. The upper floors of Barker’s contain the offices of two newspapers: the “Evening Standard”, and “The Daily Mail”. A short road, Derry Street, running between these two buildings leads into Kensington Square.

**Part 2: Two squares and the King of the Zulus**

With a private garden in its centre, Kensington Square is surrounded by some fascinating old buildings. The development of the square began in 1685, when it was named ‘Kings Square’ in honour of the ill-fated James II, who had been crowned that year. In those early days, this urban square was surrounded by countryside – gardens and fields. The Royal Court moved to Kensington Palace in the 17th century at the instigation of King William III, who ruled from 1689 to 1702. He suffered from asthma and needed somewhere where the air did not aggravate his condition. With his arrival in Kensington, the square became one of the most fashionable places to live in England. However, this changed when George III (ruled 1760-1820) moved the Court away from Kensington. After 1760, the square was mostly abandoned, and remained unoccupied until the beginning of the 19th century. Now, its desirability as a dwelling place for the well-off has been firmly restored.
The attractive garden in its centre, only accessible by residents of the square, is adorned with small neo-classical gazebo. The houses surrounding the garden have housed many famous people. Number 40 has a 19th century façade, which conceals an earlier one. It was the home of the pathologist Sir John Simon (1816-1904), a pioneer of public health. Between 1864 and 1867, the painter Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) lived at number 41, which has Regency features as well as newer upper floors.

At the south-east corner of the square, the semi-detached numbers 11 and 12 were built between 1693 and 1702. The attractive shell-shape above the front door of number 11 bears the words: “Duchess of Mazarin 1692-8, Archbishop Herring 1737, Talleyrand 1792-4”. Although it is tempting to believe that these celebrated people lived here, this was probably not the case. The Duchess, a mistress of Charles II, is not thought to have ever lived in the square. Talleyrand (1754-1838) did stay in the square, maybe or maybe not in this house, which was then occupied by a Frenchman, Monsieur Defoeu. As for Herring (1693-1757), he did live in the square but not at number 11. So, whoever put up the wording had a sense of history but not an accurate one.

Thackeray Street leads to Kensington Court, where a picturesque courtyard, named Kensington Court Mews, is surrounded by former stables. South of this, its neighbour, a 19th century brick apartment block, Kensington Court Gardens, was the home and place of death of the poet TS Eliot (1888-1965). Returning to Kensington Square via Thackeray Street, we pass Esmond Court (named after one of Thackeray’s novels), where the actress, best-known for her roles in the “Carry-On” films, Joan Sims (1930-2001), lived.
The philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) wrote important books on logic and Political Economy while living in number 18 Kensington Square (built in the 1680s) between 1837 and 1851. Close by, the row of old buildings is interrupted by a newer building, the Victorian gothic Roman Catholic Maria Assumpta Church, which was built in 1875 to the designs of George Goldie (1828-1887), TG Jackson (1835-1924) and Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912). Goldie also designed the church’s neighbouring convent buildings, which are now adorned by a ground floor gallery consisting of six large windows. Its main entrance door was added in the 1920s. The former convent is now the home of the University of London’s Heythrop College. Specialising in the study of philosophy and religion, the college was incorporated into the university in 1971. However, amongst all the university’s constituent colleges, Heythrop goes back the furthest, having been founded by the Jesuits in 1614 in Belgium. It moved to England during the French Revolutionary Wars at the end of the 18th century.

The west side of the square presents a fine set of façades dating back to when the square was first established. Each of the buildings is of great interest, but one which caught my attention is number 30, which is adorned with double-headed eagles, a symbol used by, to mention but a few: the Hittites, the Seljuk Turks, the Holy Roman Empire, Mysore State, the Russians, the Serbians, and the Albanians. The bicephalic birds on number 30 relate to none of these, but, instead, to the Land Tax Commissioner Charles Augustus Hoare of the Hoare family of bankers. He held that position in the first half of the 19th century. He bought the house in about 1820 and died in about 1862.

Number 33 was built in the early 1730s. Between 1900 and 1918, the actress Mrs Patrick Campbell (1865-1940), who was born in Kensington, lived there. She is said to have inspired some of the plays written by George Bernard Shaw. From Kensington Square, it is a short walk to High Street Kensington Station, which is entered via a shopping arcade that leads to a covered octagonal entrance area decorated with floral bas-reliefs, suggestive of the era of art-nouveau.
At the corner of Wrights Lane, where there is a branch of Boots the chemist, there used to be a branch of the Caffe Nero chain. The café was housed in an unusual, modern, glass-clad, wedge-shaped building (sadly, demolished in 2019). Further down Wrights Lane, there is a charming old-fashioned tea shop, The Muffin Man, which serves excellent, reasonably priced snacks and light meals. Before reaching this eatery, take a detour to visit Iverna Gardens. At the southern end of the small square, there is the Armenian Church of St Sarkis, which was constructed in 1922-23 with money supplied by the Gulbenkian family. Built to resemble typical traditional churches in Armenia, it was designed by Arthur Davis (1878-1951), born, and died, in Kensington.

Much of the High Street is occupied by shops housed in unexceptional buildings. To the west of most of these, stands the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Victories. Its entrance screen on the High Street was designed by Joseph Goldie (1882–1953). It served as the entrance to a church that was destroyed by bombing in WW2. The present church was built in 1957, designed by Adrian Gilbert Scott (1882-1963), brother of Sir Giles (see above).

Beyond the north end of Earls Court Road, two buildings are currently behind builders’ hoardings. One, the old post-office, will probably be demolished (it has been), but the other, an Odeon cinema, is to have its impressive neo-classical art-deco façade preserved, but its interior will be re-built. Originally named the ‘Kensington Kinema’, it was opened in 1926. It was closed in 2015. The work on the former Odeon began well before 2017 and seems to have made little progress between then and now (May 2021).

Further west, a narrow road leads south from the High Street into delightful Edwardes Square.

The critic and poet Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), who lived in the square at number 32 from 1840 until 1851, describes it well in his book about Kensington, “The Old Court Suburb”: 
“But what chiefly surprises the spectator when he first sees the place is the largeness, as well as the cultivated look of the Square, compared with the smallness of the houses on two sides of it . . ., and there is such an unexpected air of size, greenness and even elegance in the place, especially when its abundant lilacs are in blossom, and ladies are seen on its benches reading, that the stroller, who happens to turn out of the road and comes upon the fresh-looking sequestered spot for the first time, is interested as well as surprised, and feels curious to know how a square of any kind. Comparatively so large, and, at the same time, manifestly so cheap (for the houses, though neat and respectable, are too small to be dear) could have suggested itself to the costly English mind. Upon enquiry, he finds it to have been the work of a Frenchman…”

This Georgian square was laid out by a Frenchman, the architect Louis Léon Changeur, between 1811 and 1820, and named after William Edwardes (1777-1852), the 2nd Lord Kensington, who owned the land which it occupies. At the south-east corner of the square, there is an almost-hidden pub, the Scarsdale Tavern, which was established in 1867. Opposite it, is the two-storey house where the painter and writer Sir William Rothenstein (1872-1945) lived between 1899 and 1902. Like so many other London Squares, this one has a centrally located private garden. At its southern edge, there is a neo-classical pavilion, now called ‘The Grecian Temple’, and still used by the head gardener. The garden’s paths were laid out by an Italian artist Agostino Aglio (1777-1857), who, having arrived in the UK in 1803 to assist the architect William Wilkins (1778-1839), who designed London’s National Gallery and University College London, lived in the square between 1814 and 1820.

Edwardes Square Studios, facing the Temple, was home to creators including the painter Henry Justice Ford (1860-1941) and the writer Clifford Bax (1886-1962). Better-known today than these are the writer GK Chesterton (1874-1936), and the comedian Frankie Howerd (1917-1992), who lived on the square from 1966 until his death. The north-western corner of the square leads back into the High Street. Immediately west of this, there is a row of three neighbouring Iranian food stores and an Iranian restaurant. Every March, these shops sell the seven special traditional items (‘haft-sin’), including young green plant shoots and goldfish in bowls, which are used to celebrate Persian new year (‘nowruz’, which occurs on the spring equinox). These shops serve the needs of emigrants from Iran, many of whom have settled in Kensington.
Just west of the Iranian establishments, there is a cul-de-sac called St Mary Abbots Place. The façade of number 2 (part of a building called Warwick Close) is adorned with wooden carvings that have an art-nouveau motif. Above an entrance to number 9, there is a bas-relief of an eagle. Until recently, this building housed a branch of ‘The White Eagle Lodge’, a spiritual organisation founded in Britain in 1936. At the end of the street, there is a large brick building with a neo-Tudor appearance. This was built for the painter Sir William Llewellynn (1858-1941). At the northern end of Warwick Gardens, where it meets High Street Kensington, a house (number 11) bears a plaque which recalls that the writer GK Chesterton (1874-1936) lived in it. He was born in Kensington. Opposite the house on an island around which traffic flows, there is a tall pink stone column, surrounded by palms and surmounted by an urn. It is dedicated to the memory of Queen Victoria. Dated 1904, it was designed by the architect and benefactor of the arts Henry Louis Florence (1843-1916), who was President of The Architectural Association between 1878 and 1879.

The continuation of Warwick Gardens north of the High Street is called ‘Addison Gardens’. The west side of this is lined by some 19th century houses with neo-gothic features. Napier Road leads off Addison towards the Olympia exhibition halls (first opened in 1886, and extended in 1923, then again in 1930) but does not reach them. At the corner where the two roads meet, there is a large house, number 49 Addison Road. Behind it, and easily visible from Napier Road, this house has an extension with a huge ornately framed north-facing window. Above this, there is the date “1894” and a figure holding an artist’s palette overlaid with the intertwined initials “HS” and below them, a motto reads in German “Strebe vorwaerts” (i.e., ‘strive ahead’). This was the studio built for the pre-Raphaelite painter Herbert Gustave Schmalz (1856-1935), who was a friend of the painters William Holman Hunt and Frederic Leighton.

The delicate-looking 19th century gothic church of St Barnabas stands on Addison Road just north of Melbury Road. This was designed by Lewis Vulliamy (1791-1871) and built by 1829. Prior to its existence, the only parish church in Kensington was St Mary Abbots. St Barnabas was built to serve people living in the new housing that was rapidly covering the land to the west of the centre of Kensington. Unlike St Mary Abbots, it never had a graveyard because by the 1820s sanitary authorities discouraged placing these so close to the centre of London.
Melbury Road, an ‘L’ shaped thoroughfare, is lined with grand houses built between 1860 and 1905, some of them containing large artists’ studios.

Several well-known artists, members of the ‘Holland Park Circle’, lived and worked in this street and Holland Park Road that leads off it. A plaque next to a large north facing studio window on number 2 Melbury Road commemorates that English sculptor Hamo Thornycroft (1850-1925) worked here. He designed the huge statue of King Arthur that stands in Winchester. The large number 9 is in ‘Queen Anne style’ and was built in 1880. Opposite it, number 8, designed by Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912), with north-facing studios was built for the painter Marcus Stone (1840-1921). In later years, this house, now converted into flats, was (between 1951 and 1971) the home of the film director Michael Powell (1905-1990), who made many films with Emeric Pressburger, including “Black Narcissus” and “The Red Shoes”.

Melbury Road is dominated by a tall circular brick tower topped with a tiled conical roof. This is part of number 29, the Tower House. It was built between 1875 and 1880 by, and for the use of, the architect William Burges (1827-1881). Architect of Cardiff Castle and Oxford’s Worcester College, he died in Tower House soon after it was built. In the 1960s, this large, amazing brick-built mock mediaeval house was abandoned, and damaged by vandals, but it has been restored. The actor Richard Harris bought it in 1969, and in 1972 it was bought by the Led Zeppelin guitarist, Jimmy Page, who is keen on the works both of Burges and of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Stavordale Lodge, opposite the Tower, is a complete contrast. This gently curved apartment block was built in 1964. It faces the Tower House’s neighbour, number 31, Woodland House, which was built in about 1875, and designed by Richard Norman Shaw, who was well-acquainted with the art establishment. This large house was home to the painter and illustrator Luke Fildes (1844-1927). The film director Michael Winner (1935-2013) lived here from 1972 to 2013, and it is now (2017) the home of the singer Robbie Williams.
Woodsford Court, number 14, is built on the site of the home of the Scottish painter Colin Hunter (1841-1904), who lived there from 1877 until his death in an older house, which was bombed in 1940. Number 18, close-by, was the home and studio of the pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman-Hunt (1827-1910) from 1903 onwards. He died in this house. Earlier, in 1882, this house, built in 1877, hosted an important guest, King Cetshwayo (Cetshwayo, ka Mpande; c1832-1884), King of the Zulus. After being defeated by the British in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, Cetshwayo was exiled to Cape Town.

During his exile, he visited London in 1882:
“On his arrival, 18 Melbury Road … was made more appropriate to his needs and those of his chiefs. The beds, for instance, were reduced to floor level. On waking on 5 August, the ex-king ‘made his way through the various rooms of the house, examining them with curiosity’.
Outside, a huge crowd of people had gathered, eager to see Cetshwayo.
The London “Times” described how:
“…at times the ex-king would appear for a moment at one of the windows, and he was invariably greeted with cheers’. Cetshwayo himself looked upon the throng ‘as a display of friendly feeling towards him”.

By the close of his visit, he had become something of a celebrity. In an interview given while at Melbury Road, Cetshwayo said that he regarded the war as ‘a calamity’. He had made it clear that the purpose of his visit to England was his restoration to the throne, reasoning that his people wanted him and that there would be another war if he did not return. Following a meeting with Gladstone and a visit to Queen Victoria at Osborne House, his reinstatement was agreed. The British allowed him to return to Zululand in 1883.

Number 47, opposite the King’s lodging, was designed for the painter and playwright Walford Graham Robertson (1866-1948) by Robert Dudley Oliver (c1857-1923), a London-based architect. It contained Robertson’s studio, which he shared with the Scottish impressionist painter Arthur Melville (1858-1904) from about 1896 until Melville’s death. Above the attractive front door, there is a bas-relief of the coat-of-arms of the Robertson Clan.

Holland Park Road runs from Melbury Road back to Addison Road. Number 10, South House with annex bearing a prominent Dutch gable, was built in about 1893. It stands on the site of the former farmhouse of Holland Farm, on whose lands Melbury Road was laid in 1875. The building contained the studio of the Anglo-American portraitist James Jebusa Shannon (1862-1923). The studio and its adjoining residence are now used as two separate dwellings.

Leighton House, next to Shannon’s, rivals Tower House in its extraordinariness. It was the home and studio of the painter Frederic Leighton (1830-1896). In 1864, he leased the house in Holland Park Road from Lady Holland.
With the help of the architect George Aitchison (1825-1910) Leighton modified it and was able to occupy it in late 1866. Amongst many additions made by Leighton, the most remarkable is the Arab Hall (1877-79). This room, decorated in a Moorish fashion, was built to accommodate Leighton’s considerable collection of tiles that he had acquired during his visits to the east. The hall also contains carved Damascus latticework and other souvenirs from the Middle East. A gentle fountain adorns the floor of the hall and adds to its exotic atmosphere.

The exterior brickwork of the hall and its tiled dome surmounted by the crescent of Islam reflect the hall’s oriental interior. The Arab Hall is reason enough to visit Leighton House, but there is more to see. Visitors can wander around some of its rooms, climb up the tile-lined staircase, view the north-facing studio, and enjoy the occasional special exhibitions held regularly in the house and its attached Perrin Gallery (designed by Halsey Ricardo [1854-1928], and completed 1929).
Leighton House, Kensington
The lovely large garden of Leighton House is occasionally open to the public. From its lawn, you can get a good view of Leighton’s studio windows framed in Victorian cast-iron. It also contains a long path covered by a leafy trellis and on the lawn, there is a large sculpture of a ‘tribesman’ fighting a large serpent. Called “A Moment of Peril”, it was sculpted by Leighton’s friend Thomas Brock (1847-1922), who, also, created Imperial Memorial to Queen Victoria in front of Buckingham Palace, and the statue of Queen Victoria that stands at the edge of Cubbon Park in Bangalore (India). During summer, coffee and other refreshments are available for visitors to purchase.

Leighton’s neighbour to the west was the artist, a pre-Raphaelite as were several of his neighbours in Kensington, Valentine Cameron Prinsep (1838-1904), who was born in Calcutta (India) of British parents. His house, number 14, was designed by Philip Webb (1831-1915) and built in the mid-1860s. A ‘father’ of arts-and-crafts architecture, Webb did not give the exterior of this house many of the style’s typical florid characteristics. A resident in the garden of a neighbouring house pointed out to me that the number 14 has an amazing variety of differently sized windows.

Number 20 Holland Park Road (built late 1870s), where the caricaturist Phil May (1864-1903) lived and worked, is joined to its western neighbours by an arch. A roadway passes under the arch to the entrance of Court House, a relatively modern home (built 1929; architect: AM Cawthorne). Without any special architectural merit, it stands on ground, which was occupied by fields and gardens, which in the 1860s neighboured the grounds of Little Holland House (demolished 1875 to lay out Melbury Road). The sculptor and painter GF Watts (1817-1904) had once lived in that now non-existent house.

Returning to High Street Kensington, we find, on the eastern wall of the Melbury Court block of flats, a plaque commemorating the cartoonist Anthony Low (1891-1963), who lived in flat number 33.
Set back from the main road, and partly hidden by two hideous cuboid buildings, stands an unusual glass-clad building with an amazing, distorted tent-shaped roof (made of copper). This used to be the Commonwealth Institute. Built in 1962 (architects: Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall & Partners), I remember, as a schoolboy, visiting the rather gloomy collection of exhibits that it contained shortly after it opened. The Institute closed in late 2002, and the fascinating building stood empty until 2012, when it was restored and re-modelled internally. In 2016, it became the home of the Design Museum. Like the architecturally spectacular Guggenheim Museum in Manhattan, the building competes with the exhibits for the viewer’s attention, and then wins over them easily. The displays in the Design Museum are a poor advert for the skills of British designers, whereas the building’s restored interior is a triumph. This is a place to enjoy the building rather than the exhibits. One notable exception to this comment is the sculpture by Eduardo Paolozzi (1924-2005), which stands outside the front of the museum.

The museum borders Holland Park, which is well-worth exploring. By the park’s High Street entrance, there is a plaque giving the history of the ‘Trafalgar Way’. This was the route taken between Falmouth and London by Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotière (1770-1834), when he carried news of Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar in 1805. It is at this point that I will let you rest on a bench in the park, or to enjoy the delights of its lovely Kyoto and Fukushima Japanese Gardens.

Kensington, a village beyond London’s 18th century limits, assumed importance when the Royal Court moved to Kensington Palace. Since then, it has become incorporated gradually into the city without losing too much of its earlier charm. Not too far from the Royal Academy, many artists have lived in the area. Today, it is one of the more prosperous parts of London, favoured by increasing numbers of wealthier foreigners as a desirable place to reside. Visit the area, and you will see why.

*If you are craving more of Kensington’s attractions, let me alert you first to a small street that contains an impressive building, and then to another short throughfare with artistic associations.*
A KENSINGTON CHAPEL

Allen Street, which runs south from Kensington’s high street, offers a view of a building that outshines many of its close neighbours. But, before we reach this short side street, here are a few more words about High Street Kensington. Even before the covid19 pandemic, High Street Kensington has been declining in importance as a centre of retailing activity. The retailing boom that made the street into a rival of, for example, Oxford and Regents Streets, began in the mid-1860s. Prior to that, as reported by the detailed on-line British History Survey:

“…most trading and manufacturing activity around Kensington High Street was on a small and local scale. An exception must be made of the Catholic candle-making business owned successively by the Wheble, Kendall, Tucker and Smith families from about 1765 until 1908. Its founder was James Wheble (1729–1801), scion of a prominent recusant family in Winchester. By 1766 at the latest Wheble was based in Kensington, and within a few years occupied miscellaneous properties on the present Barkers site, both in the High Street and on the west side of Young Street, where a warehouse was rated in his name from 1772 onwards.”

This mention of candle making interested me because my great grandfather Franz Ginsberg (1862-1936) established a factory making candles in King Williams Town in South Africa in the 1880s.

From the late 19th century until a few years ago, High Street Kensington was a healthily flourishing retail centre. In its heyday, it boasted of three large department stores, Pontings, Barkers, and Derry & Toms. The impressive buildings that housed the latter two still stand and are fine examples of art deco architecture located close to the Underground station, which has been in service since the late 1860s. In recent years, the advent of on-line shopping, high rents, and the proximity of the Westfield Mall at Shepherds Bush (opened 2008), which has good parking, have conspired together to make High Street Kensington less appealing to shoppers. Consequently, at any one time a large proportion of shops remain empty awaiting new tenants. Sadly, what was once (especially in the 1960s and ‘70s) a bustling high street with trendy shops like Biba and the ‘funky’ Kensington Market, both gone, has become slightly dreary.
Various short streets lead off the south side of the high street. One of them, Young Street, leads to Kensington Square, which is described above. Another road, Allan Street, west of the station, leads south from the High Street. This thoroughfare was a quiet cul-de-sac until 1852, when it was extended southwards. After that date, many more buildings were erected along it including the extensive Wynnstay Gardens, containing luxurious mansion flats, which was constructed between 1883 and 1885 on a site previously owned by Thomas Newland Allen (1811-1899), who was born at Chalfont St Giles. Incidentally, a monument to Captain Cook, the explorer, stands on the estate where Allen was born.

Wynnstay Gardens is not a particularly attractive set of buildings. However, south of it and on the other side of Allen Street, there is a lovely neo-classical building, a church, just south of Adam and Eve Mews. For many years, I had noticed it from a distance when wandering along High Street Ken, but it was only recently that I decided to take a closer look at this edifice.

Currently called the ‘Kensington United Reformed Church’, it was originally named ‘The Kensington Chapel’. Built in 1854-55 and designed by Andrew Trimen (1810-1868), it replaced the Hornton Street Chapel (north of the High Street), which was built 1794-95. Trimen was a prolific architect. He published a book in 1849, “Church and Chapel Architecture with an account of the Hebrew Church. 1,000 authenticated mouldings”, which was the first major publication to consider the architecture of buildings for non-conformists. The church, clad in ochre coloured Bath stone, and its impressive, pillared portico, is an elegant addition to an otherwise undistinguished street. Its corner stone recalls that the church replaced the one in Hornton Street and that it was laid by the Reverend John Stoughton on the 26th of June 1854. If you walk along Adam and Eve Mews, you will notice a pair of doors at the east end of the north wall of the church. Above them are the words ‘Lecture Hall’. According to a plan of the original building, this led into a ‘schoolroom’ (built 1856) attached to the east of the church. This was used to accommodate ‘British’ and ‘Sunday’ Schools.

John Stoughton officiated first at the Hornton Street Chapel, starting in 1843, and then in the new building in Allen Street until he retired in 1875. His congregation was far from uninteresting as this quote from John Stoughton’s book “Congregationalism in the Court Suburb” (published in 1883) reveals:
“It may be mentioned that Kensington, on many accounts, has long been a favourite place of residence for artists and literary men, and a few of these became some occasional, others regular hearers [i.e. members of the congregation] … Curious characters at different periods, it may be added would come into the vestry to have a little chat; a gentleman during the Crimean War gravely proposed to the preacher of peace a clever scheme for blowing up Sebastopol; and at another time one of clerical appearance repeated, with extraordinary rapidity, long passages out of the Greek Testament.”

Stoughton was such a popular preacher that by 1871, none of the 1000 sitting places in the chapel would be left unoccupied.

The chapel in Allen Street was damaged by bombing in 1940 and only repaired in 1952-53. Today, the building stands in all its glory and hosts regular religious services for its Congregationalist congregation (it is an autonomous protestant church, which governs its own affairs), but parts of it are now used for non-ecclesiastical purposes. Next time you wander along High Street Kensington, make the short detour to see what I consider one of the finer buildings in the area in addition to the already-described Armenian Church in nearby Iverna Gardens.

**PEEL AND FLINT**

Walking along a short street in Kensington during one of the covid19 ‘lockdowns’, I observed things that I had never noticed before and was reminded of Tony ‘M’. When I was a student of dentistry at the University College Hospital Dental School, I first met Tony in the third year. In that year, we began to learn how to make gold crowns (‘caps’) for our patients. Instead of sending the work out to be done by technicians, we, the students, had to learn the ‘nitty gritty’ of fabricating crowns. We were assigned to one of three or four technician tutors. I was assigned to Tony’s group.

Why visiting Peel Street made me think of Tony will be revealed shortly.
Peel Street just south of Notting Hill Gate lies in land that used to be known as ‘The Racks’. It was part of the extensive estate of Campden House, which was owned by the Phillimore family. In the early 19th century, the land was bought by John Punter and William Ward, who divided the land between them in 1823 after having agreed to lay out two roads: Peel and Campden Streets.

Peel Street lay in Punter’s share of the area. Although Punter retained several plots along Peel Street, the rest were sold to various people. Nearer the eastern end of the street several buildings were demolished between 1865 and 1875 during the construction of what is now the Circle Line. Though the tracks are underground, there are no buildings built above them. If you look through the gap on the north side of the road, you can see the rear of a brick building which fronts on Edge Street. Near the top of this place, some bricks have been made to project slightly and to spell the name ‘LESLE’. The rear part of this L-shaped building is currently occupied by ‘The Spanish Education Office’. This building was flying Spanish and EU flags. I have no idea about the significance of ‘Leslie’.

One of the houses on the south side of Peel Street used to be a pub. It still bears the lettering ‘Peel Arms’. It was probably in existence by 1889, but today it is a private dwelling. The pub’s clientele were probably mostly workers who toiled in the gravel pits that abounded in the neighbourhood.

The pub is not far from the six-storey Camden Houses, brick-built blocks of flats erected in 1877-8 for labourers, some of whom might well have drunk at the Peel Arms. The blocks contain 125 separate flats. The entrances to the blocks have art nouveau features. The building was designed by the architect Edwyn Evans Cronk (1846-1919) for the National Dwellings Society Ltd. Cronk was born in Sevenoaks (Kent) and died in Redcliffe Square in South Kensington.
At the western end of Peel Street, there is another pub, The Windsor Castle. Unlike the Peel Arms, this is a working establishment, now popular with the locals, most of whom are no longer poorly paid labourers. It was originally built in about 1826 and then remodelled in 1933. The pub contains much of its original late Georgian building fabric and is a Grade II listed place. Although I have passed it often, I have never entered it or its reputedly fine garden.

At the Eastern end of Peel Street, there is a wine bar, The Kensington Wine Rooms. When we were getting married, back in 1993, the premises were occupied by a branch of the Café Flo restaurant chain. We held a pre-wedding dinner there. The premises now housing the wine bar once housed a pub, The Macaulay Arms. It was listed as being in existence in the 1868 edition of “Allen's West London Street Directory”. Thus, residents of Peel Street were only a few steps from three public sources of booze.

The directory lists the residents of Peel Street in 1868 as follows:


Most of the inhabitants listed above appear to have been tradesmen, merchants, and craftsmen, rather than labourers. This is probably because the list was compiled before the Campden Houses were built to house manual labourers and their families. Incidentally, there is still a greengrocer on Peel Street. Jack and Jessie’s excellent shop is opposite the Kensington Wine Rooms.

Peel Cottage stands almost at the corner of Peel Street and Campden Hill Road. It is next to number 118 Campden Hill Road (aka ‘West House’), a building on the corner of Peel Street designed for the artist George Henry Boughton (1803-1905) in the late 1870s by Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912). New Scotland Yard and Lowther Lodge (home of the Royal Geographical Society on Kensington Gore) were amongst the many other buildings designed by Shaw. Another artist, the landscape painter Matthew Ridley Corbet (1850-1902) lived at number 80 Peel Street, where the gardener, H Evans once lived.
The entrance to Peel Cottage, which is dwarfed by its neighbours, is partially covered with ivy. A blue, circular commemorative plaque on the wall next to its entrance plaque informs the passer-by that the artist Sir William Russell Flint (1880-1969) lived in Peel Cottage from 1925 until his death. This brings me back to Tony M, about whom you must have thought I had forgotten.

As a dental student, I spent many hours with Tony M as I struggled to make decent gold crowns that would fit my patients’ teeth in the conservation clinics of the Dental School. Each encounter with Tony involved a trip to the canteen in the school’s basement. Tony was unable to function without a fresh cup of the school’s barely drinkable coffee. Over cups of insipid coffee, Tony used to encourage us when the clinical teachers made our lives miserable. His main role was help with our technical work. During one of our sessions together, Tony, knowing that art interested me, suggested that I visit Cottrell’s showrooms in nearby Charlotte Street (numbers 15-17) to see the fine collection of paintings that hung on its walls. Cottrell’s were an important supplier of dental equipment and materials. Today, although it has retained its original Victorian frontage, it is the premises of the Charlotte Street Hotel. Dutifully and because I was curious, I visited Cottrell’s showroom and looked at the framed watercolours hanging on the walls of the two ground floor showrooms. The paintings were all works of the inhabitant of Peel Cottage, William Russell Flint.

Flint was born in Edinburgh. He studied at Daniel Stewart’s College and then Edinburgh Institution. Between 1900 and 1902, he worked as a medical illustrator in London. Later, he produced illustrations for books and “The Illustrated London News”. He was elected President of the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours, a position he held from 1936 until 1956. He was knighted in 1947. Flint produced many well-executed, delicately tinted water-colour paintings. He often visited Spain, where he made plenty of images that often included sensuous portrayals of women in various stages of undress. It was some of these titillating paintings that Tony had sent me to see on the walls of Cottrell’s showroom.

Having explored the streets of Kensington, let us begin strolling along watersides, beside some of west London’s canals and rivers.
BESIDE CANAL AND RIVER

The River Thames flows through London, sinuously from west to east. It is fed by numerous tributaries, some of which flow through the metropolis, but are rarely seen because over the years they have been covered over and built upon. Examples of these hidden tributaries include the rivers named Fleet, Westbourne, and Tyburn. Less hidden are the Rivers Lea (east and northeast London) and Brent (north and west London). Also visible is most of the canal system of west London. These canals were important transport arteries before the advent of the railways in the first half of the 19th century. Now, they are hardly used for their original purpose but mostly for leisure activities. We will start by taking a stroll beside the Paddington Arm (branch) of the Grand Union Canal system and through a charming public garden alongside a short stretch of it.

MEANWHILE AND MOROCCO

Between 1994 and 2001, I treated patients at a dental practice in Golborne Road in North Kensington. The place was like a United Nations of bad teeth. My patients hailed from places including Brazil, the Caribbean, Italy, Spain, Zimbabwe, Ireland, England, Egypt, Uganda, Portugal, St Helena, Italy, the USA, and North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco). Most of the North Africans were from Morocco because many people of Moroccan origin live in the housing estates that are close to Golborne Road. Although I used to make good use of the lovely shops and eateries on that road and nearby Portobello Road, I never bothered to walk northwest along Golborne beyond Trellick Tower (designed by Ernő Goldfinger and built in 1972), in whose shadow the road lies. The brutalist Tower, which I like, stands next to the Paddington Arm (branch) of the Grand Union Canal. At its base and running along about 450 yards of the southwest side of the canal, is the Meanwhile Garden, which we first visited in 2021, almost 20 years since I stopped working at Golborne Road.
Since the worsening of the covid19 pandemic in December 2020/January 2021, we began looking out for shops where there are few other customers and there is plenty of space to avoid them. We discovered that at quiet times, the Ladbroke Grove branch of Sainsburys, which is next to the canal towpath a few feet west of the bridge carrying Ladbroke Grove over the canal, is such a place. I have never been in a supermarket with such wide aisles between the shelving units and chiller cabinets. It is well-stocked, and the staff are helpful. The check-out area looks as if it has been designed with efficient ‘social distancing’ in mind. In addition, the large car park allows drivers to leave their vehicles free-of-charge for up to three hours. Do not worry, I do not have shares in Sainsburys.

Sainsbury’s Ladbroke Grove branch is across the canal from the eastern end of a large burial ground, The Kensal Green Cemetery. It lies between the canal and Harrow Road. Opened in 1833, its creation was inspired by the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris (France), which was opened in 1804. Wandering through the extensive grounds of the Kensal Green Cemetery is both pleasant and interesting. Being so close to London, many famous people from all walks of life have been interred here. As you stroll amongst the graves, you are bound to see names you recognise. The crematorium attached to the cemetery has also been a point of final departure for many celebrities, including, for example, Ingrid Bergman (1915-1982) and Freddie Mercury (1946-1991). It was also where the notorious Christine Keeler (1942-2017) was cremated. But let us now return to less morbid matters.

After a spell of shopping, we tend to walk east along the towpath that runs along the Paddington Arm of The Grand Union Canal past the supermarket. Apart from joggers, who often feel (sometimes aggressively) that they have right of way over other pedestrians, and (usually considerate) cyclists, this path affords a pleasant and visually varied place to stretch one’s legs. Walking east from Sainsburys, soon the towpath runs alongside Meanwhile Gardens. There are several apertures through which one can enter the gardens from the towpath, and you can also gain access to the place from the streets that surround it.
The Meanwhile Gardens were conceived as a green space for the local, then generally low-income, mixed race community, in 1976 by Jamie McCollough, an artist and engineer. They were laid out on a strip of derelict land, which once had terraced housing and other buildings before WW1. The garden received financial assistance from the Gulbenkian Foundation and other organisations. The garden was, according to circular plaques embedded in the ground, improved in 2000.

The Garden and the Sainsbury supermarket are in a part of London that used to be known as ‘Kensal Town’. Where the supermarket is now was part of an extensive gasworks, the remains of which can be seen nearby in the form of a disused gasometer. Residential buildings began appearing in the 1850s and many local people were employed in laundry work and at the gasworks of the Western Gas Company that was opened in 1845.

In the 1860s and 1870s, there was much housebuilding in and around the area now occupied by Meanwhile Gardens. Golborne Road was extended to reach this area in the 1880s. Many of its inhabitants were railway workers and migrants, whose homes in central London had been demolished. The area was severely overcrowded and extremely poor. Few houses had gardens and the population density was high. After WW2, many of these dwellings were demolished and replaced by blocks of flats, including Trellick Tower, and smaller but salubrious shared dwellings. These residential streets contain the homes of many of my former dental patients.

A winding path links the various parts of the lovely garden including a sloping open space; a concrete skate park; a children’s play area; several sculptures; small, wooded areas; some interlinked ponds with a wooden viewing platform; plenty of bushes and shrubs; bridges; and a walled garden that acts as a suntrap. Near the latter, there is a tall brick chimney, the remains of a factory. The chimney was built in 1927 near to the former Severn Valley Pure Milk Company and the Meadowland Dairy. It was the last chimney of its kind to be built along the Paddington Arm canal and is completely dwarfed by the nearby Trellick Tower.
The Moroccan Garden, an exquisite part of the Meanwhile Gardens, was opened in 2007 by Councillor Victoria Borwick on behalf of the local Moroccan community. It celebrates the achievements of that community and is open for all to enjoy. A straight path of patterned black and white tiling leads from the main path across a small lawn to a wall. A colourful mosaic with geometric patterning and a small fountain is attached to the wall, creating the illusion that a tiny part of Morocco has been transported into the Meanwhile Garden. Nearby, there are a few seats for visitors to enjoy this tiny enclave within the gardens.

Words are insufficient to fully convey the charm of the Meanwhile Garden, one of west London’s many little gems. If you can, you should come to experience this leafy oasis so near the busy Harrow Road. In addition, a stroll along the canal tow path, where you can see an amazing variety of houseboats and plenty of waterfowl, is bound to be rewarding.

Having described the Meanwhile Garden, we will next set off east along the towpath next to the Paddington Arm canal.
London is blessed with an abundance of open spaces where one can exercise and enjoy reasonably fresh air. In addition to parks, woods, the banks of the Thames, and squares with gardens, the towpaths alongside canals provide visually fascinating places to walk, run, or cycle. These canals used to be important routes along which freight could be transported right across England before they were rendered almost redundant by the advent of the railways. Despite this, they have been well maintained and give great pleasure to many people.
On the 6th of November 2020, we walked along a branch of the Grand Union Canal from Golborne Road (near Portobello Road) to Paddington Basin, which only became accessible to casual visitors in about 2000, when it was redeveloped. We began our walk in Meanwhile Gardens, already described. This green space runs alongside a short stretch of the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal, which was opened for use in 1801. We walked across the narrow park and onto the towpath. Although we have walked along this often, what attracted me, in addition to the variety of barges and waterfowl, were the diverse bridges that cross the canal and its towpath.

The first bridge under which we walked is that carrying the Great Western Road over the canal. This is a cast-iron, single-arched bridge with the Union Tavern at its northern end. It looks like a Victorian design.

Heading east, after walking below the sweeping curve of the Westway, an elevated motorway (the A40, built between 1962 and 1970), we reached a bridge that carries the Harrow Road, once an ancient road from London to Harrow, over the canal. This iron bridge with brick abutments is shorter than the previous one because the canal narrows temporarily as it passes beneath it. A few yards east of this, there is another bridge that crosses the canal to reach an old, derelict building that must have been a factory in the past. The bridge, known as the ‘Pipe Bridge’, has a roof and is completely enclosed with translucent panelling. It looks as if it was built in the last few decades, and it leads from the factory to a solid brick wall which serves as its abutment on the south bank of the canal.

Four hundred yards east of the Pipe Bridge, after passing the green space around the Church of St Mary Magdalene (designed by George Edmund Street [1824-1881] and built 1867-1872), we pass beneath a concrete footbridge with iron railings and decorative lamp posts that links Delamere Terrace and Lords Hill Road with Blomfield Road across the canal. The approach to the bridge from Delamere Terrace is an elegant helical ramp. This modern crossing is known as the ‘Ha’Penny Bridge’ (i.e., half penny).
The towpath runs southeast and alongside Delamere Terrace and reaches the building that houses the Canal and River Trust. This is the former Toll House, at which canal users used to be charged a fee for entering the canal. This is next to another bridge, a delicate-looking cast-iron structure with masonry abutments topped with distinctive lamp stands. This carries Westbourne Terrace Road (laid out in the early 1850s) over a constricted section of the canal. East of this, the canal enters a vast triangular expanse of water, the junction of three waterways: the Paddington Arm from west London, its continuation towards Paddington Station, and the Regents Canal that leads to Camden Town and beyond, towards east London.

Either the poet Robert Browning (1812-1889), who lived near to this junction area, or Lord Byron (1788-1824), is credited with christening this district as ‘Little Venice’, the name by which it is known today. Apparently, Byron compared the dirtiness of the canals in Venice with those in Paddington:

“There would be nothing to make the canal of Venice more poetical than that of Paddington, were it not for its artificial adjuncts.”

Apart from the presence of water, I find it hard to find any similarity with Venice in Italy. With its willow trees, colourful barges, a wealth of waterfowl, and some floating refreshment outlets, Little Venice is a popular place for tourists, both local and from further afield. It is the starting point for various boat trips to Camden Lock. Of these, I recommend a trip on a boat called “Jason” (see below). The small island in the middle of the watery space, inhabited only by birdlife including cormorants, is called Browning’s Island. It is now a protected nature reserve.

We leave Little Venice by walking southeast along the next section of the Paddington Arm (canal). Soon, we reach another bridge, an undistinguished structure that carries the Harrow Road over both us and another short, constricted section of the canal. The next 450 yards of the towpath on the west side of the canal has been redeveloped recently and is lined with eateries both on the shore and on boats moored alongside it.
After walking beneath a concrete bridge, the Westway Viaduct, carrying the Westway high above us, we soon reach a fascinating footbridge over the canal. The span across the water is approached by both curving staircases and spiral ramps. This suspension bridge is supported by cables fanning out from a tall pole on the eastern side of the canal. It is known as the ‘Harrow Road’ footbridge. Despite an extensive search of the Internet, I have not yet discovered who designed this structure, which is a visual delight in comparison with the next bridge we reach: an inelegant concrete span, which carries Bishops Bridge Road over the waterway.

Shortly before the direction of the canal changes from southeast to due east, we need to cross it over a curious looking modern footbridge that runs beneath what looks like a double wall of glass panels. This, the Station Bridge (Paddington Basin), leads from the east side of Paddington Station to a footpath leading to North Wharf Road. It was completed in 2004 by the Langlands and Bell partnership. Having crossed this distinctive bridge, we are now on the final stretch of the blind-ending Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal. Next, we encounter another suspension footbridge with perforated metal panels along both sides of its footway over the water. This bridge leads to a car park next to an ugly twentieth century block, a part of St Mary’s Hospital. It is the Paddington Basin Footbridge designed by Sidell Gibson Architects.

A few yards further east, we cross a short blind-ended inlet by means of a short bridge known as The Rolling Bridge. Designed by the Thomas Heatherwick Studio and completed in 2005, this bridge curls up into a circle to allow boats to enter or leave the inlet. Routinely, this pointlessly complex yet interesting bridge is opened briefly at noon on Wednesdays and Fridays and at 2pm on Saturdays.

On Fridays at noon, or when necessary, the last bridge over the Paddington Arm, a few feet away from its eastern terminus, can be seen in action. At rest, the Fan Bridge (aka Merchant Square Bridge) looks unexceptional. However, when it is raised to allow passage of vessels, it is extraordinary. As the bridge rises, it splits into sections resembling five blades of a pen knife (or segments of a lady’s fan) when they are all opened. The bridge is twenty feet long, was designed by Knight Architects, and completed in 2014. We were lucky enough to see this bridge open, and then to watch it closing.
Beyond the Fan Bridge, the canal ends abruptly. Trellick Tower, where we began our perambulation was a landmark in modern architecture when it was built. The Fan Bridge, constructed 42 years later, is another exciting development in design. In between the tower block and the unusual bridge, we passed beneath or over several canal crossings representing various points in the history of bridge design, many of them adding beauty to a lovely waterway that provides pleasure for many people.

The Fan Bridge opened

Next, a small diversion that takes us out of west London. It describes an aspect of canal transport of yesteryear.
LEGGING IT THROUGH THE TUNNEL

The waterways, which meet at Little Venice, are the part of the Grand Union Canal system that links London with Birmingham (and many other places in the UK). Two of the waterways that meet at Little Venice are the two sections of the Grand Union Paddington Arm canal that links Paddington with Brentford on the River Thames in west London. The third is the Regent’s Canal that links Little Venice with Limehouse Basin next to the Thames, 1.6 miles east of Tower Bridge. The three waterways enter the large expanse of water, one at each of its three corners.

The Regent’s Canal leaves the Little Venice triangle of water by passing beneath the decorative cast-iron bridge carrying Warwick Road and then heads northeast for 475 yards. It is flanked by Blomfield Road, lined with fabulous mansions, on its north side, and Maida Avenue on its south side. This stretch of water has many houseboats moored along it. Then, the waterway enters a 243-yard-long tunnel that begins beneath a pleasant café on the Maida Vale section of Edgware Road. The canal emerges from the tunnel a few yards northeast of the eastern end of Aberdeen Street. This street, which has few if any outstanding architectural features, was once the home of the bomber pilot Guy Gibson (1918-1944) who was awarded a Victoria Cross; he was the Leader of the Dambusters Raid in 1943.

The tunnel through which the Regent’s Canal flows is called the Maida Hill Tunnel. It was constructed between 1812 and 1816. There are no towpaths in the tunnel, which is narrower than the open-air sections of the canal at either end of it. Therefore, in the days before engines were fitted to boats, horses could not be used to drag the barges through this subterranean section of the canal. Instead, the barges had to be ‘legged’. Men lay on their backs on planks on top or sides of the barge, and using their raised legs, they pressed their feet against the roof or walls of the tunnel, ‘walked’ them along it, and thus they propelled the vessel through the tunnel. This was not without its dangers. For example, in 1825 the planks supporting three men, who were working their way along the roof of the tunnel, accidentally slipped off the top of the barge. One man was seriously injured and the other two were killed.
Much water has flowed through the tunnel since then. Today, pleasure boats, powered by engines, still pass through it. The best way to experience the Maida Hill Tunnel is to take one of these cruises. I have taken one on the “Jason”, which I will describe in the next section. Although this book is mainly about west London and the cruise takes you away from it, it is a worthwhile and enjoyable thing to experience.

A CANAL, A CRICKET GROUND, AND A CRUISE

Before the advent of railways, transportation of goods across England (as well as Wales and Scotland) was heavily dependent on an extensive canal system constructed mostly in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Freight was carried along these canals in the holds of long narrow vessels, correctly known known as ‘narrow boats’. They had to be slender enough to negotiate some of the narrower canals that formed part of the canal network. Prior to the development of steam and other kinds of engines, and even for some years after these became available, the narrow boats were towed by horses. These creatures walked along paths known as ‘towpaths’ that run along one or other side of a canal (but never on both sides at the same location). There were no towpaths beside a canal when it passed through a tunnel. At tunnels, the towing horses had to walk across the hill through which a tunnel ran, and the boats had to be ‘legged’, as I have described already.

In the tunnels, where horses could not enter because there were no towpaths, the boats were propelled by the feet of men lying either above the load on the boat or sometimes on planks projecting from the sides of the vessel, a process known as ‘legging’. This is interesting enough but becomes even more so when you experience a trip on a canal in a narrow boat.
Several companies offer canal trips between Little Venice and Camden Lock, east of it. We chose to travel on “Jason”, a narrow boat built in 1906 and one of the last of its era still in use. “Jason” has been little modified compared to others that ply the route along the Regents Canal. “Jason”, which was originally horse-drawn, has been fitted with a diesel engine that occupies part of the small rear located cabin that was once the home to a boatman and his family. Passengers sit in the long, narrow goods hold of the boat under an awning that was added when “Jason” was converted from a freight carrier to a tourist vessel in about 1951, when it first began taking visitors on tours. Unlike most of the other tourist boats, there are no windows separating passengers from the exterior. This provides for great viewing along the route without the hindrance of sometimes not too clean glass, which might be encountered in other vessels.

The tour starts from a landing stage next to Blomfield Road, close to the cast-iron bridge that carries Westbourne Terrace Road over the Paddington Arm of the Grand Union Canal. At the other end of the trip, passengers disembark or embark next to the popular (but not with me) and rather ‘tacky’ Camden Lock Market. The cruise between the two landing stages takes 45 minutes and is highly enjoyable. Travelling eastwards from Little Venice, we were given an extremely clear and intelligent commentary by a lady called Sarah. Various things she told us made a strong impression on me.

The Regents Canal links Paddington Basin to Limehouse Basin in east London, where it leads to other canals. It was used to carry a wide range of goods, from coal to cocoa. One of the many goods carried was gunpowder. In 1874, the gunpowder being carried by a narrow boat exploded when passing beneath the Macclesfield Bridge in Regents Park. Three boatmen were killed, and bridge was destroyed but, remarkably, it was reconstructed a few days afterwards.
The waterway passes under both railway and road bridges. Many of the latter have curved arches over the canal; are made of stone; and look older than the rail bridges, most of which have rectangular arches with roofs consisting of metal plates screwed together. Over the years, the tow ropes drawing the narrow boats have cut grooves or notches in the corners of the bridges next to the towpath. Some of the bridges have been protected from this damage by iron brackets placed so that the ropes passed over these instead of the masonry of the bridge. These metal protectors, which were easily replaceable, can now be seen to be notched where the ropes have abraded them.

“Jason”, like most other narrow boats, has a flat bottom and a shallow draught. This is because the water most of the canal system is quite shallow, usually not more than 6 feet deep. The bottom of “Jason” is made of wood (probably elm) and iron, a combination known as a ‘composite’ construction. Few narrow boats with this kind of construction exist today.

The most fascinating thing that Sarah told us related to the history of Lord’s Cricket Ground. In 1787, Thomas Lord (1755-1832), a professional cricket player, opened his first cricket ground in what is now Dorset Square (close to Baker Street Underground station). In 1809, Lord shifted his cricket ground to another location because the rent at his Dorset Square site became too high. The new location was on some disused ground just south of the present Lord’s Cricket Ground. It was where today the Regents Canal emerges from the eastern end of the long Maida Hill Tunnel. In 1813, Parliament altered the route of the proposed Regents Canal so that it passed right through Mr Lord’s recently relocated cricket ground. Mr Lord was unhappy about this and was not prepared to give up his ground without first going to court. According to our guide, Lord struck a deal with the government. He agreed to move to a new site providing he was given all the earth that was excavated during the construction of the Maida Hill Tunnel. He used the vast amount of excavated earth to lay out the ground on which the present Lord’s Cricket pitches are now located.

Concerning construction of the waterways, Sarah told us that not only had the tunnels been dug by hand, but also the entire canal system. Most of the manual workers were Irish and were known as ‘navigational engineers’, or ‘navvies’ for short. The base of the Regents Canal is lined with compressed clay to make it watertight, a difficult process when the canal was built.
The cruise between Little Venice and Camden Lock passes through a variety of landscapes, ranging from disused industrial to bucolic. The canal passes through the northern edge of Regents Park, where it is lined with trees and parkland. In this stretch of the canal, it is difficult to believe one is in the middle of a huge metropolis and not in the deep countryside. The waterway also passes through the London Zoo. On one side, if you are lucky, you can catch glimpses of African hunting dogs and the occasional warthog in their cages overlooking the canal. Opposite them on the northern bank of the canal is Lord Snowdon’s aviary (erected 1962-65), now devoid of birds and awaiting a new purpose.

The 45-minute cruise provides an enchanting view of several districts of London. The commentary provided by Sarah and what she pointed out along the route helped to recreate in my mind the golden age of canal transport. We enjoyed the cruise in both directions and hope that many others will take advantage of the special experience that it provides.

The canal system that I have described above, the Paddington Arm and the Regents Canal, carried freight westward to the main Grand Union Canal that meets the River Thames west of central London at the mouth of the River Brent at Brentford. At first, the canal and the River Brent (a tributary of the Thames) run in parallel in some places, and together as one in others.

The next section will describe the River Brent, which has one of its sources in north London at East Finchley, where its tributary, the Mutton Brook, rises.

The Mutton Brook, which I have known since childhood, meets another small river, the Dollis Brook, near Golders Green in northwest London. Together, their waters become the River Brent. Some of what follows relates to Mutton Brook, which is not in west London. However, the water flowing in Mutton Brook flows gradually until it reaches Brentford, which is in west London.
MUTTON BROOK TO BRENTFORD

When I was a child living in the Hampstead Garden Suburb, my friends and I used to play beside a then rather foul-smelling little stream that flowed near to the Market Place on Falloden Way. It is no longer malodorous. In those days, I had no idea that the water in this rivulet, Mutton Brook, eventually flowed into the Thames in west London.

In this section, I will describe two parts of one of London’s longer tributaries of the River Thames, the River Brent. The first part deals with Mutton Brook, one of the tributaries of the Brent. The second explores Brentford, where the River Brent merges with the Thames.

The River Brent begins where the waters of its two main tributaries, Dollis Brook and Mutton Brook, merge near Golders Green. Dollis Brook has its sources near Arkley and Mill Hill in the London Borough of Barnet. Mutton Brook rises from Cherry Tree Wood (formerly ‘Dirthouse Wood’, a remnant of the historic mediaeval ‘Finchley wood’ that was once well-known for its highwaymen). It is not far from East Finchley Station, which is where my ‘exploration’ begins. East Finchley Underground station is above ground. Art-deco in design (architects: Charles Holden and LH Bucknell), this was built in the latter half of the 1930s. A ten-foot-tall sculpture of a kneeling archer, sculpted by Eric Aumonier (1899–1974) overlooks both the platforms and the station’s forecourt, and recalls that East Finchley used to be at the edge of the ancient Royal Forest of Enfield where both royalty and commoners once hunted.

The Brook first becomes easily visible at Lyttelton Playing Fields. Next to a small café, which is in a pavilion containing a Jewish kindergarten, often guarded by security men, a short path leads a few feet northwards to a small bridge. It is from this brick-walled bridge that we first catch sight of Mutton Brook. Confined between banks lined with wooden planking and flanked by bushes, it is no more than about two feet wide at this point.
The stream flows towards Northway in a stone-lined channel that curves sinuously through a strip of cultivated parkland. When I was a child, there was a small putting-green in this park, but that has gone. The single-arched bridge carrying Northway over the stream has iron railings. The water flows next through Northway Gardens between almost vertical banks like a groove cut into the lawns.

At Finchley Road, the Brook flows unceremoniously beneath the roadway near to what used to be known in my childhood as ‘Henlys Corner’. This important junction of Finchley Road and the North Circular Road was so named because between 1935 and 1989 there used to be a branch of the Henlys Motors group of garages on its south-western corner.

West of Finchley Road, Mutton Brook continues almost parallel to the North Circular Road. It flows through pleasantly rustic parkland - lawns and woods - until it reaches a point where the North Circular Road begins curving in a south-westerly direction. After passing a fading sign that declares “Polluted Water Keep Out”, both the footpath and the brook pass under the main road inside a large diameter concrete-lined tunnel, circular in cross-section. The footpath follows the Brook for about one third of a mile from the tunnel before reaching the last bridge that crosses Mutton Brook. This footbridge with wrought-iron railings crosses the stream a few feet from the point where it joins Dollis Brook at right angles.

The water flows together from the two streams to become the River Brent.

A few yards away from its commencement, the River Brent flows under a road bridge with white stone balustrades. This bridge marks the western end of Bridge Lane, which begins in Temple Fortune, and the eastern end of Bell Lane, which leads north towards central Hendon. After crossing Bridge Lane, another footpath enters Brent Park.

The River Brent flows approximately parallel to the North Circular Road until it meets the A40. A more picturesque name for this busy road might be ‘The Brent Valley Highway’.
Brent Park, which was opened to the public in 1934, contains a body of water of historic interest, the Decoy Pond. Decoy ponds were used to capture waterfowl for food. When the birds entered such a pond, the hunters lured them with bait to narrow inlets where they were easily trapped in tapering nets. The age of the pond is uncertain, but by 1754 there was a house ‘Decoy House’, named after the pond, in existence. While the water of the pond is placid, the Brent that flow past its northern edge is quite a torrent in comparison. Meanwhile, on the south side of the pond, but high above it, traffic rushes along the North Circular. Oddly, this hardly disturbs the peace of the lovely park.

Brent Street crosses the River Brent over a brick bridge with wrought-iron railings. Beyond this, the river flows south-westwards between the back gardens of buildings on both sides of it, and there is no footpath to follow. On the eastern side of the bridge, and only just visible through the dense vegetation, it may be seen that the river flows through a narrow artificial weir built between two ruined circular towers covered with graffiti. Each of these has a conical roof with several tiles missing. They appear to have been designed as viewing points or gazebos. They stand in what used to be the grounds of Brent Bridge House, which was an 18th century stuccoed building, once the country seat of the Whishaws. Charles Whishaw had converted it from a farmhouse into a ‘gentleman’s residence’ by 1828. John Wishaw, who was a son of the lawyer Richard Wishaw (1707-1787) also lived there. Later, parts of this building were incorporated into the now long-since demolished Brent Bridge Hotel (opened just before 1914).

Having examined something of the sources of the Brent, we shift several miles downstream, south-westwards to its ‘estuary’, to where it flows into the River Thames at Brentford, now a part of west London.

The name ‘Brentford’, which appears in an early 8th century (AD) record, might refer to a ford over either the River Brent or the River Thames, which was in earlier times quite shallow where the Brent enters it. In any case, during the 1st century AD, there was a settlement there on a Roman Road from London to the west country. Archaeological evidence has been discovered, which suggests that long before the Roman invasion of Britain, there was a Neolithic settlement at what is now Brentford.
Our exploration of Brentford begins outside its simple but elegant County Court, which was designed by CG Pinfold, and opened in 1963. Despite its age, it looks almost contemporary. A pink granite structure, the Brentford Monument, cylindrical in shape, stands outside the court. It commemorates four events in the history of Brentford: the fording of the Thames by Julius Caesar in 54 BC and the brave resistance that Cassivelaunus and his British soldiers (described as ‘tribesmen’ on the monument) offered against the Romans who were trying cross the river to reach Verulamium (near the modern St Albans); King Offa’s meeting of the Church Council in about 780-81 AD; the battle between King Canute and the Danes in 1016; and the Battle of Brentford (1642), a Royalist victory during The Civil War.

Next door to the court, is Alexandra House, an asymmetric brick building with some circular windows and flat roofs at different levels. It was built as a health centre in 1938. It was designed by LA Cooper and KP Goble in a ‘cubist’ design that looks like a three-dimensional version of a Piet Mondrian painting. Both buildings are on the High Street, as is the Old Fire Station, which is east of them. The gables of this lovely red brick building are decorated with terracotta tiles bearing floral designs. Designed by Nowell Parr (1864-1933), it was opened in 1898. The fire station was closed in 1965, and then used as an ambulance station until 1980. Since 1990, it has been used as a restaurant.

Ferry Lane runs from the High Street to Soaphouse Lane, passing the Watermans Arms pub, which was first established in 1770, but the establishment now occupies a newer building. Facing a small dock at the end of the eastern ‘arm’ of Ferry Lane, where canal narrow boats converted to houseboats are moored, stands the 18th century Peerless Pump Building. This was built in about 1720 (although it bears a sign with the date ‘1704’). It was home to the Rowe family, who were proprietors of the former ‘Thames Soap Works’, which flourished during the 18th and 19th centuries. By the end of the 19th century, the soap works occupied almost all the area between the High Street and the two branches of Ferry Lane. The small dock, an inlet from the Thames near the mouth of the Brent used to be called ‘Soaphouse Creek’. The company prospered until the early 20th century when it began to go into decline. Between 1916 and 1933, Lever Brothers tried to keep it going, but eventually closed it down. In 1952, some of the premises were used by Varley Pumps, and then later by Peerless Pumps (until 1989). In the 1990s, Rowe’s 18th century house was restored to its former glory and retains the name ‘Peerless Pump Building’.
A cobbled lane with inset steel rails, along which a travelling crane once used to move, runs along the eastern edge of Soaphouse Creek towards the Thames. At the end of the tracks, there stands a large beautiful curved, curtain-like, steel sculpture, whose silvery surface is covered with delicate patterns. This is called ‘Liquidity’ and was created by Simon Packard in 2002. After it was completed, some locals objected to it, and wanted it pulled down, but it has survived … so far. It stands close to where for many centuries a ferry used to cross the Thames to Kew. This ferry was free to locals until 1536, when John Halle was appointed its keeper and charged one quarter of a penny to pedestrians and double that to horsemen. The ferry continued to operate from this spot close to the former soap works until 1939.

From the sculpture, it is easy to view the Thames and the mouth of the River Brent. The wedge of land formed between the two rivers is now covered with housing that surrounds Brentford Marina. This piece of land is reached by walking along Dock Road, which passes what was formerly dockland, ‘Brentford Docks’. In addition to the docks, there was a vast, now demolished, railway marshalling yard reached by a side-line that branched off the main Great Western Railway (‘GWR’) at Southall. Opened by the GWR in 1859, it continued working until 1964. A few years later the former dockland was re-developed for other purposes.

Between Brentford and southern Hanwell, the River Brent shares its waters with the Grand Union Canal. Until 1794, when the lower stretch of the Brent was engineered to become part of the canal system, the river could only be navigated by small craft.

A few yards from the Brent’s estuary, there is the ‘Thames Lock’, which is overlooked by the bridge carrying Dock Road. This lock was built to bypass the last of many waterfalls over which the Brent flows before entering the Thames. At the lock, the river bifurcates, some water going via the lock, and the rest via the falls. A small island covered with boat-repair yards exists between this fork in the river and where the two branches re-join downstream.
The small Johnsons Island is immediately upstream from the lock and the waterfall. It was named after Dr Robert Wallace Johnson (c1730-1813), who lived in The Butts nearby. He was not only a medical man and a keen naturalist but also owned a starch house, a steam mill, and other properties. A map dated 1900 marks the island as the home of ‘Staffordshire Wharf’. Since the 1990s, the island has been used as an artists’ colony.

Further upstream, Augustus Close crosses the Brent obliquely over a bridge, which is in the same spot as that which used to carry the railway to Brentford Docks. The current bridge incorporates sections of the original rail bridge that was built as part of Isambard Brunel’s (1806-1859) last great engineering project.

The Brent curves northwards and passes under Brentford High Street which is carried across Brentford Bridge. This stone bridge, which is largely hidden by ugly metal cladding and parapets, was built in 1818. It is the latest ‘reincarnation’ of the first bridge, which was built in 1284. The closed Six Bells pub is close to the bridge. Already licensed by 1722, the present building has existed since 1904. The ‘six bells’ refer to six bells that used to be rung in the nearby St Lawrence Church on special occasions. The church, which was built in the 15th century, has alterations designed either by the architect Thomas Hardwick (1752-1829), who was born in Brentford, or by his father, also an architect, Thomas Hardwick (1725-1798), and completed in the 18th century.

A short distance upstream from the bridge, the Brent widens where the Brentford Gauging Lock with its two lock basins stands. This was once one of the busiest places on the Grand Union Canal. Its name refers to the fact that it was there that the tollkeeper assessed how much cargo was being carried by each barge. The present toll-keeper’s office was built in 1911. It contains a small exhibition. A mile-post next to the western lock basin informs that the lock is 93 miles from Braunston (in Northamptonshire), a central location on the canal system of the Midlands.
The Brent divides above the lock. One branch serves as the canal, and the other, which curves around an island covered with new housing blocks, falls picturesquely over a waterfall. The Brent then continues towards the A4 road, and the view along it is dominated by the recently built Glaxo Smith Kline skyscraper.

After viewing the lock and before exploring further upstream, let us ramble around the town of older parts of Brentford.
OLD BRENTFORD

The Weir Bar, a pub clad with green tiling around its ground floor, is a short distance from the waterfall mentioned above. Before 2004, it was called ‘The White Horse’. The pub has been in existence since the beginning of the 17th century, or earlier. The building that now houses it once belonged to the butcher William Marshal. His nephew, the greatest (in my opinion) British painter William Turner (1775-1851), lived here with his uncle between 1785 and 1787. It is said that Turner painted some of his first watercolours while living in this building. One of the artist’s biographers, Peter Ackroyd, relates that Turner was sent by his parents from London:

“… to the more salubrious atmosphere of Brentford by the Thames … and was despatched to the care of his uncle … who followed the family tradition of butcher … He was sent to the Free School where … his aptitude for drawing did not go unrecognised for long …”

And, although the rest is history, Turner’s remarkable artistic career can be said to have begun in Brentford.

A small road next to The Weir leads into The Butts, so named since 1596. A ‘butt’ is an archery shooting target or range. Also, it can be a piece of raised ground, a word derived from the French ‘butte’. Whatever its meaning, The Butts is an open space surrounded by beautiful houses, many of them built in the 18th century. Some of them are even older, dating from the late 17th century. Being so close to what is quite a mundane High Street, this ensemble of historical edifices comes as a delightful surprise, and it alone can make a visit to Brentford worthwhile. With their lovely architecture, well-tended gardens, attractive doorways, these buildings are worthy of close examination.
One building on the Butts is newer than the others. Bearing the date 1904, this is the Boatmen’s Institute. Designed in the Arts and Crafts style by Noel Parr (1864-1933), who built many pubs for west London’s Fullers Brewery, this was built for the London City Mission on the site of an old mill (close to the waterfall mentioned above). Its original purpose was to educate the children of boatmen, who operated the narrow boats carrying freight on the canals, and to provide medical assistance for the boatmen’s wives. The ‘boatpeople’, who, like the Roma and Travellers, lived a life in constant motion. They lived apart from the rest of the population and were barely catered for. Therefore, the Institute, which cared for them, was much appreciated by them. It is one of only five or six examples of such an establishment to have been set-up in the UK.

Near to the Butts, there is another charitable institution, the St Mary’s Convent, also known as ‘St Raphael’s Convent’. The oldest part of the convent, which is almost opposite Beaufort House, was built in about 1792, and was originally the home of a Dr Cooper. It was bought in 1880 by Mother Mary Magdalen, a convert to Catholicism from Anglicanism, who had nursed in the Crimean War in the 1850s. The convent was gradually enlarged by adding an unattractive brick building in the early twentieth century. It houses, and caters for, women with learning difficulties and other problems.

The Butts was an extension of the Market Place. The latter’s most interesting structure is now occupied by The Verdict, a beautiful café. This is housed on the ground floor of what was once the Court House. This stands on the site of what had been a market building for almost 300 years until it was demolished in about 1850. The present building, built as a town hall in 1852, was never used as such. Instead, it served as a courthouse. In 2012, the court was closed, and the building converted into flats above, and the eatery below them. Returning eastwards along the High Street, we reach the present County Court the Brentford Monument, both already described.

Having explored some of the historic sites in Brentford, we return to The Grand Union Canal. This waterway travels from Brentford to Bulls Bridge Junction near Southall, where it meets the Paddington Arm that leads eastwards to Little Venice and beyond. North of Bull’s Bridge Junction, the Grand Union Canal continues towards Braunston, Birmingham, and further afield. Next, we look at a stretch of the canal between Brentford and Hanwell.
The former court house in Brentford
LOCKS AND LUNATICS

The Grand Union Canal and its shorter branches link London with Birmingham and many other places. For much of its course, it runs vaguely parallel to the route of the M1 motorway, possibly one of the least attractive highways in England. Unlike the motorway, the canal winds its way through picturesque countryside for much of its course. Starting at Brentford on the River Thames, the canal and the River Brent follow the same course (as well as a section of the M4 motorway), but they part company at a bifurcation close to The Fox pub at Hanwell, about two miles (as the crow flies) from the old bridge, which carries Brentford High Street over the River Brent. Moving along the canal northwards from this parting of the waters, one arrives at a place of great interest.

The bifurcation is about 34 feet above sea-level. From that point, the canal’s route curves leftward changing its direction from northwest to southwest, and in so doing it reaches land that is 86 feet above sea level. This curve is about 700 yards in length. To be able to move vessels between these two altitudes, there is a series of six hand-operated locks, known collectively as the Hanwell Lock Flight. They make an impressive sight. Each of the six locks enables a craft to negotiate about nine feet of the change in altitude. This is slightly less than the deepest lock on the Grand Union Canal system, Denham Deep Lock, which is 11 feet and one inch.

An old wall, now a protected historical structure, to the east of much of this flight of locks separates the grounds of the former County Lunatic Asylum (‘Hanwell Asylum’) from the canal and its towpath. The wall, formerly that of the Lunatic Asylum was probably built in the 1830s. As for the locks, they would have been built at the same time as the canal, that is between 1793, when its construction was authorised and 1805, when the section between Brentford and Braunston was completed. The work on the canal was supervised by William Jessup (1745-1814), who was the Chief Engineer, and James Barnes (c1740-1819), the Resident Engineer. Each lock is separated by a widened part of the canal, a pool where boats could wait before using the next lock on their journey. The pools have small ramps that were used to lead towing horses from the water if they fell into it accidentally, as often happened when they tripped on the towing ropes of barges awaiting the locks.
The wall of the former asylum has small (now blocked up) rectangular openings a few inches above the towpath. These were designed to be opened if the asylum caught fire. Water taken from the canal could then be pumped through these holes and into the asylum precincts. Between Locks numbers 94 and 95, the pool widens slightly next to the wall of the former asylum. This part of the wall has a bricked-up archway, which used to be a canal-side entrance to the asylum. Old maps show that this archway led to a small square dock within the walls of the asylum. The north and east sides of this dock were flanked with the asylum’s mortuary building. To the west of this, there was a burial ground. The dock was used to unload supplies, mainly coal, to the asylum. The asylum grew most of its own food, and any surplus that it produced was loaded on to barges at the dock.

Hanwell Asylum was the first such establishment to be opened in the county of Middlesex. The second was the better-known one at Colney Hatch (at Friern Barnet), which was opened in 1850. Writing in 1876, James Thorne describes that the inmates of the asylum at Hanwell were treated in ways far better than they might have been in other such places, then and earlier. He wrote that the 1100 women and 650 men confined there ‘enjoyed’:

“...a system of entire ‘freedom from restraint on the part of the patients, ample occupation, amusement, and absence of seclusion; with constant kindness of manner and sleepless vigilance on the part of the attendants, and unceasing watchfulness by the superiors’, a system now happily established in all our larger asylums.”

These improvements were introduced under the management of the psychiatrist Dr John Conolly (1794-1866), who qualified in medicine at the University of Edinburgh in 1821. In 1828, he was appointed Professor of medical practice at the recently established University College in London (now ‘UCL’). Two years later, he published a book, “Indications of Insanity”, and in 1839 he became Resident Physician at the Hanwell Asylum. There, he introduced the practice of not restraining patients suffering with what was then known as ‘insanity’. Although he was not the first to do this, his actions ensured that humane methods of treatment including ‘non-restraint’ became accepted practice all over the country. In 1856, Conolly published a book on this subject, “The Treatment of the Insane without Mechanical Restraints”. Despite this, the patients were locked into the asylum beside the locks.
In 1929, the asylum was renamed as ‘St Bernard’s Hospital’, which it remained until the mid-1970s, when the government redeveloped the site to become part of Ealing Hospital. The former Victorian asylum buildings have become the Ealing Hospital, St. Bernard's Wing, for psychiatric patients.

The asylum has an interesting connection with a house in west London’s Holland Park Avenue: number 131, just west of Notting Hill Gate. The house bears the name ‘Old Well House’. It was built on land that had been part of the grounds of Norland House, which was destroyed by fire in 1825. Two years later, 25 acres of the grounds were offered for sale by its then owner, the clockmaker Louis Vulliamy, to the Justices of the Peace for Middlesex, who were looking for a place to site a new lunatic asylum. The property had a good water supply from an artesian well 260 feet in depth, which had been sunk at great expense in 1791. However, the land was too costly for the Justices, and they purchased the canal-side site at Hanwell instead. The artesian well has since been filled in but a plaque commemorating its existence can, I have read, be found in the rear garden of Old Well House.

The walk along the Grand Union Canal/River Brent towpath from Brentford to the Hanwell Lock Flight is just over three miles. At times, the waterway passes so close to the M4 motorway that you feel that you can almost touch the traffic roaring past, yet even when this and modern buildings are nearby (e.g., the impressive headquarters of Glaxo Smith Kline with its colourful outdoor sculpture by Allen Jones), the canal runs within a lovely corridor of greenery, where the occasional waterfowl such as ducks, coots, cormorants, swans, and herons can be spotted. As you walk along, it is sometimes difficult to believe that you are winding your way through the sea of suburbia that spreads in all directions from the edges of central London.

I first walked along this stretch of the waterways during the last week of the November 2020 covid19 ‘lockdown’. On reflection, it seems appropriate that my perambulation took me past locks and a place where unfortunates with mental disorders were once locked-up, or should one say ‘locked-down’?
We will return to the Grand Union Canal after taking a wander from Wembley (on the border of west and northwest London), of football fame, to Alperton, an area where many Gujaratis, Tamils, and other people with origins in the Indian subcontinent congregate.
WEMBLEY AND ALPERTON

SOCcer AND SAMOSAS

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the construction of London’s local railways, notably the Metropolitan Line, improved transport between the centre of the city and places that had been open countryside before the rails were laid. The builders of the Metropolitan Line kept hold of land surplus to the requirements of railway building. The excess land was developed for housing purposes, thus ensuring a supply of passengers who could use the Metropolitan trains to commute to and from their workplaces. To sell housing, the railway company developed the concept of ‘Metro-land’, which was to promote the idea of living in idyllic rustic surroundings close to London. However, as Oliver Green writes in his introduction to a modern (1987) facsimile of the promotional literature “Metro-land, 1932 edition”:

“The notion of Metro-land as a ‘rural Arcadia’ certainly no longer matched the suburban reality of Wembley Park or Rayners Lane…”

Our starting point, Stonebridge Park Station, is close to both the North Circular Road and the River Brent, which flows besides it. The name ‘Stonebridge’ is derived from the stone bridge over the river at this location, built between 1660 and 1700. It was considered unusual at that time because most of the crossings of the Brent were then wooden. In the 1870s, developers started erecting villas for professional men and their families in an estate called ‘Stonebridge Park’. By the late 19th century, houses were being built in the area for people with lower incomes than the professionals in the estate. The station stands surrounded by soulless landscape that includes the busy North Circular Road as well as a few high-rise buildings, some of which look derelict or unused. From the station, there is a good view of the soaring arch that spans the not-too-distant Wembley Stadium. In addition, there are plenty of streets lined with two-storey residential building of barely any architectural merit.
Point Place leads from the station to the Harrow Road, a thoroughfare that has linked Paddington and Harrow for several centuries. Point Place crosses a short narrow channel lined with concrete walls. This contains a small stretch of Wembley Brook, a tiny tributary of the River Brent. After crossing Harrow Road, it is a short distance to Brent River Park, also known as ‘Tokyngton Recreation Ground’. Tokyngton means ‘the farm of the sons of Toca’. The name was first recorded in 1171, and in mediaeval times it was the most populous part of the parish of Harrow. The long, narrow park contains a stretch of the River Brent, which winds through it. By the entrance near to Monks Park Gardens, there is a sculpture in the form of a stone with carvings on it. This is near a well-equipped playground. When I visited it (in 2017), most of the children playing in it were young girls wearing Islamic head-coverings.

There is a substantial bridge across the Brent close to the playground. A path snakes its way northwards, often quite close to the riverbanks, which are lined by trees and bushes. Another bridge crosses the river about halfway along the length of the park. This bridge, smaller than the southernmost one, is close to a clearing which contains something that could easily be mistaken for an abstract sculpture by Anthony Caro. This was built in 2012. It is, so the “Kilburn Times” reported: “A pavilion which outlines the dangers of climate change while offering residents a place to shelter … The pavilion, which was suggested by the Friends of Brent River Park, has a sustainable urban drainage system for when the park experiences flooding … The structure can also be used by Brent schools as an outdoor classroom for pupils to study and understand climate change and environmental issues in a natural setting.” Although I saw it only a few years after its inauguration, it is heavily oxidised and looks as if it is past its best, but it makes for an intriguing sculptural form.

Walking through the park, it is at times difficult to believe that this rustic-looking area is so near to monotonous rows of suburban dwellings. A short walk from the pavilion, and you are plunged into neat suburban streets. The local roads are narrow, reflecting the paucity of motor traffic during the inter-war years when they were laid out. Then, car ownership was low compared to today. The long Oakington Manor Drive was mostly built between 1914 and 1932 on land that had been ‘Oakington Farm’ (marked on both 1761 and 1873 maps). This thoroughfare, like all the residential streets nearby, is lined with houses, many of them decorated with fake half-timbering on their facades. This artifice, according to Michael Robbins writing in “Middlesex” (first publ. 1953), was:
“... to inform the observer that the house was not built by a local council...”
Instead, it was paid for by its owner.

Several houses had strings of faded bunting hanging above their front doors. These are the homes of Hindus, who often decorate the entrances to their homes with ‘thoran’ (these are often also in the form of leaves or small dried fruits or peppers). Thorans are believed to beneficial for a household’s well-being. Oakington Manor Drive leads towards the centre of Wembley, where many people with origins in the Indian subcontinent reside.

A short lane leads from Oakington Manor Drive to Sherrins Farm Open Space, a large triangular grassy area on the south facing slope of a hill. This is in the place marked as ‘Oakington Farm’ on maps drawn before WW2. ‘Oakington’ might well be phonetically related to ‘Tokyngton’. The two names are used interchangeably to denote the same area. ‘Sherrins’ was the name of the farm during the last few decades of its rural existence. The Open Space is a good place to get a view of the exterior of the new Wembley Stadium as well as providing a panorama of central London. Within sight of the stadium, young boys play football in the small park. Maybe in the future, some of them might be playing in the nearby world-famous stadium.

Oakington Manor Drive meets the Harrow Road just before it becomes Wembley High Road. Near this point, stands the tall brick-built tower of St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church. Designed by Reynolds and Adrian Gilbert Scott (1882-1963; grandson of Sir George Gilbert Scott), it was built between 1955 and ’57. Its interior is extremely dramatic. Curved arches straddle the nave, and between them there are circular concavities, like the interiors of domes.

A main road, Wembley Hill, begins opposite St Josephs. A pedestrian way leads off this street at an acute angle, passing over a modern suspension bridge above Wembley Stadium Station.
Beyond the bridge, looms Wembley Stadium. The current building, designed by Norman Foster’s architectural firm, was completed in 2007. Its distinguishing feature, which can be seen from many points in north London is a huge steel arch: a lattice of criss-crossing steel rods that spans the stadium like a rainbow. Its purpose is to support the weight of much of the stadium’s roofing. The present stadium stands on the site of a much older one built in 1923, which was demolished by 2003. The older stadium, which was first named ‘British Empire Exhibition Stadium’, was built as part of the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–25. When, to many people’s dismay, this much-loved landmark in the world of British and International soccer was demolished. The rubble from it was collected and used to construct four artificial grass-covered hills next to the A40 road near Northolt. These hills, the remains of the old stadium, form the ‘North Fields’ country park.

*You could walk to Ealing Road from Wembley Stadium, but as there is little or nothing of note on the way, I would advise boarding a bus.*

Ealing Road begins on Wembley High Road a few bus-stops west of St Josephs. Sanghamam vegetarian restaurant sits at the union (‘sangham’ in some Indian languages) of Ealing Road and Wembley High Road. It offers what in India would be described as ‘multicuisine’ – that is food from a variety of widely differing gastronomic traditions (in Sanghamam’s case, this includes Gujarati, Punjabi, Sri Lankan, and Chinese). The restaurant’s signage is in several scripts including English, Hindi, Gujarati, and Tamil. A short way down Ealing Road, is the first of many jewellery shops, strung out along this thoroughfare like beads on a necklace. I saw a display of gold ornaments is in the window and some words in Tamil script.

The Wembley Central Mosque complex on Ealing Road is housed in buildings that have features typical of the Arts and Crafts style popular at the beginning of the 20th century. The building with the clock-tower, now the mosque, was built in 1904, and designed by Thomas Collcutt (1840-1924) with his apprentice Stanley Hamp (1877-1968). It was originally built as ‘St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church’. In 1993, the local Muslim congregation acquired into this church, which had stood empty for almost fifteen years. They moved here from an earlier mosque that they had built in 1985 in a semi-detached house on Harrowdene Road. The current mosque and its annexe can accommodate 1250 worshipers.
Yet another manifestation of Ealing Road’s association with the Indian Subcontinent is a branch of the Indian ICICI Bank, which is housed in a semi-detached Victorian house at number 49. The other half of this building is currently (2017) occupied by JM Amin, a firm of solicitors.

Further along, stands Ealing Road Methodist Church, a brick neo-gothic building with a polygonal tower topped with a tiled steeple. South of the Methodist Church, Ealing Road becomes a busy shopping centre. There are large shops selling clothes made in the Indian styles: kurtas, saris, salwar kameez, bridal wear, lenghas, chania choli, and traditional Indian sub-continental men’s wear. There is no need to fly to India or Pakistan to be properly kitted out. You need go no further than Ealing Road. Also, there is no shortage of jewellery shops supplying high carat gold jewellery in traditional Indian designs. At the lower end of the price scale, there are vast fruit and vegetable stores, well-supplied to satisfy even the most demanding of vegetarians. And there are many vegetarians living in this area, many of them of Gujarati heritage.

If you are keen on South Indian vegetarian food, there are several eateries, where you can have your fill. One of these, which I have visited frequently, is a large local branch of Sakonis. Before my first visit to India in 1994, my then future wife used to dine with me at Sakonis to help me become acquainted with South Indian food, such as I was going to encounter when I accompanied her to Bangalore, where we got married. It was at Sakonis that I ate my first ever dosa (a crepe-like pancake made with rice-flour) and delicious ‘mogo chips’ (an East African dish), which are deep-fried strips of cassava. The inclusion of the latter on the menus of Sakonis and other vegetarian restaurants in the area reflects the fact that many of the Indians in Wembley have come to the UK from Uganda (expelled by Idi Amin in the 1960s), Kenya, and other regions of East Africa.

If you wish to cook your own food, then everything you need in an Asian kitchen is available at Popat Stores, which has been purveying kitchenware since 1972. ‘Popat’ is the Hindi word for ‘parrot’, but unfortunately it can also mean ‘to goof-up’. Nearby, there are many shops with display stalls out on the pavement in front of them. They sell everything from shoes to devotional objects, but few if any books.
Amidst the food shops, jewellers, clothing stores, sweet shops, paan shops, bangle shops, and so on, stands the small Wembley Gospel Hall, which was opened in 1924. The congregation moved there from an older hall close to Alperton Station, which they had used since the 1890s. Notices on the building include texts in Gujarati script, reflecting the fact that there are speakers of this language amongst the Hall’s congregation. Within the Hall’s fence, there is a bilingual sign (English and Gujarati) exhorting people neither to drop litter nor to spit. Next door to the Hall, there is a branch of the VB & Sons chain of supermarkets, which have been in existence for more than 20 years. VB’s stores, which are well patronised especially by the Gujarati and Tamil communities, offer a wide range of foodstuffs from various kinds of rice and dal to spices, all required for both Gujarati and South Indian cuisines. These stores can supply ingredients in anything from small family amounts to huge industrial catering sizes. This is the place to go if you need, for example, several gallons of lime pickle or 25 Kg sacks of lentils or other pulses.

Just south of the shopping arcade, but north of Alperton Station, stands the Alperton Baptist Church. This simple brick building with five windows just beneath its roof was built before 1932. It is adorned with the Union Jack and flags from seven different countries including India and Pakistan.

The church is a dramatic contrast to the Hindu temple that it faces across the Ealing Road. The Shri Vallabh Nidhi Mandir (‘mandir’ means ‘temple’) is a flamboyantly decorative oasis in the desert of dull suburbia surrounding it. Located on land where a school once stood, the Mandir is an exciting riot of fine ornamentation. It was built using ochre-coloured stone from Jaisalmer (in Rajasthan, India), as well as various types of marble. Like much older Hindu temples in India, the surface of the building is rich in intricately executed religious carvings as well as depictions of scenes from Hindu legends such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The Mandir was opened in May 2010 with a special ceremony. This eye-catching, attractive building’s appearance easily rivals that of the much visited (by Hindus and non-Hindus alike) marble Neasden Temple (opened in 1995), which is not far away.
Many of the residential houses were built around Wembley during the 1920s and ’30s, the period when ‘art-deco’ flourished. Yet these homes, which were built at the same time as the Chrysler Building in New York, the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, and many superb cinemas in London, are, to put it politely, unimaginative, and dull to behold. In contrast, London Transport built many of the stations that serve the local Piccadilly Line in this style, and they are successful from an aesthetic viewpoint. Alperton Station is no exception. The original station was opened in 1910, and then demolished by 1931. It was replaced by the present, elegant art-deco station designed by Charles Holden (1875-1960), who designed many other stations for the Underground as well as buildings such as the Senate House (built 1937) of the University of London and Zimbabwe House (built in 1907-1908, originally for the British Medical Association its façade includes sculptures by Jacob Epstein) on the Strand.
Alperton Station is next to Alperton Garage, a depot for buses. Soon after this, Ealing Road makes a right angle turn and then continues south-eastwards instead of gently south-westwards, as it had been from its start at Wembley High Road. Immediately, after turning the corner, the road crosses the Grand Union Canal - Paddington Arm, which was opened for navigation in 1801.

I walked east along the canal’s well-maintained towpath between Ealing Road and Acton Lane. It is lined with vegetation along its length. Along this stretch, the canal, which is close to several industrial units, passes through residential suburbia, but one is hardly aware of this. Linking parts of west London with central London, the towpath is used by many commuters on bicycles. Despite numerous signs exhorting them to give way to pedestrians on the path, most of the cyclists travel at high speed, as if they are training for the Tour de France. In addition to these thoughtless cyclists, there are many pedestrians, many of them with non-European appearances.

The canal, which was originally designed to transport goods, was not empty. I saw a steady stream of narrowboats travelling in both directions. One warm afternoon, I noticed that many of the helmsmen ‘steering’ these often colourfully decorated craft were quenching their thirst with cans of beer. The water is filled with waterfowl: families of swans, ducks, and moorhens, some of which were sitting on their nests. They swim amongst the waterweed and discarded bottles and cans floating on the surface.

At one point, the canal crosses high above the River Brent, which seemed to be lost in dense vegetation growing on its banks. Immediately east of this point, the canal is divided into two ‘lanes’ by a long, slender island, which has two identical concrete-topped brick cubes, each bearing the coat-of-arms of the County of Middlesex. This island spans the length of a bridge (an aqueduct) that carries the canal high over the busy traffic on the North Circular Road. The original aqueduct was built at the same time as the North Circular in the early 1930s. It was strong enough to repel bombs placed at either end of it by the Irish Republican Army in 1939. In the early 1990s, when the North Circular was widened, the original aqueduct was replaced with the present longer one.
East of the aqueduct, there is more industrial land usage than west of it, where there is more of the ‘Metro-land’ type of residential estates than industrial structures. The Grand Junction Arms is a pub next to the Acton Lane bridge over the canal. With canal-side outdoor seating, this makes a pleasant refreshment stop. The pub was first opened as a ‘beer house’ in 1816. From 1861, it was known as the ‘Grand Junction and Railway Inn’. In the 15th century, Sir John Elrington (died 1483), the Lord of Twyford and sometime Member of Parliament, had his manor house near where the bridge is today. The parish of Twyford, whose name derives from ‘Tueverde’ meaning ‘two fords’, covers about 280 acres of the southwest of modern Willesden.

Across the canal and facing the pub, there is a modern café, with an open-air terrace overlooking the water. When I passed it, many of the outdoor tables were occupied by women wearing bourkas. For, they were about to enjoy Lebanese food in this establishment named ‘Beit el Zaytoun’ (meaning ‘House of Olives’), which appears to attract reviews varying much from ‘great’ to ‘awful’. This was the case when I passed it in 2017.

This ramble has taken us through areas of London rarely visited by tourists (except soccer aficionados), and, probably, with good reason. Viewed from a bus, car, or train, there is little to tempt the passer-by to stop in Wembley and its environs. I hope that what I have written about the district demonstrates that what, at first sight, looks dull, often deserves closer examination.

I have been mentioning the River Thames frequently, but until now, I have not described walking beside it. Next, I will describe a stretch of the river, which is well worth visiting both for its beauty and its richness in historical connections.
Alperton Underground Station
I was taking a photograph outside a house on the riverbank at Chiswick, when a man sitting in a van nearby called me over to tell me about the building. During our conversation, he said that the River Thames was used to carry freight, just like the M4 motorway does today. He was right. Before the early 19th century when the railways were built, the river, equipped with locks where necessary, was used to transport goods by boat or barge. After the advent of the railways, except for the tidal stretches of the river (particularly to the east of London), the waterway almost ceased to be used for transport. The next section follows the Thames upstream from Hammersmith Bridge to Barnes Bridge. Along this delightful stretch of the river, one can see many examples of buildings built in the 18th century and earlier and discover several lovely places to stop for a drink.

King Street, Hammersmith’s high street, was part of the Great West Road (the ‘Bath Road’, and more recently the ‘A4’). This road, which existed before the Roman conquest, connects the City of London with Bath and Bristol. As late as the mid-19th century, this road through Hammersmith was lined with orchards and market gardens. In his “View of the Agriculture of Middlesex” (publ. 1807), J Middleton wrote: “From Kensington, through Hammersmith, Chiswick, Brentford, … the land on both sides of the road for seven miles in length … may be denominated the great fruit-garden, north of the Thames, for the supply of London…”

Gradually as the 20th century approached, these bucolic scenes disappeared, and were replaced by urban sprawl as London grew westwards.
In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, industrial buildings existed close to Hammersmith’s River front. On a 1936 map, the following are marked: a lead mill; a large water pumping building; an industrial bakery; breweries; a folding-box maker; and a motor works. Interspersed with these, there were many wharves, boathouses, clubs, pubs, and private residences. Today, the industry has disappeared, but the homes, pubs, clubs, and boathouses remain, making a riverside walk between Hammersmith and Barnes Bridge a pleasurable experience.

Stepping out of the Broadway Centre, which incorporates one of Hammersmith’s two Underground stations (that of the Piccadilly Line and a branch of the District Line), a shopping mall, and a busy split-level bus station, the first sight of interest is Bradmore House. This was originally an 18th century extension of a 16th century building, Butterwick House. The extension was built by Henry Ferne, Receiver General of Her Majesty’s (i.e., Queen Anne) Customs, to house his mistress, the leading actress Mrs Anne Oldfield (1683-1730). Butterwick House was demolished in 1836, followed later by its extension. The 18th century baroque façade, which used to face the original house’s garden, was dismantled, and stored. It was reassembled and put onto a 20th century bus garage, facing west instead of its original east. The garage was demolished, and then replaced by a newer Bradmore House, completed in 1994 with the original 18th century façade still facing west.

Directly across Queen Caroline Street in a large green space, stands the large neo-gothic church of St Pauls (consecrated 1883), which was designed by JP Seddon (1827-1906) and HR Gough (1843-1904). There have been churches on this spot since the early 17th century. In the late 1990s, I attended a couple of intriguing theatrical performances staged in the then rather neglected church. One of these had four lively actors, who continuously and confusingly kept changing roles. More recently, the church has been restored and a modern extension, the St Pauls Centre (opened 2011), added to its west end.

Immediately to the south of the church, traffic races over the Hammersmith Flyover. Designed by G Maunsell and Partners, this viaduct, which is over 2000 feet long, was completed in 1961. Built using a design that was very new at the time, this road bridge allows some traffic to avoid the terribly busy Hammersmith roundabout beneath it. Once, it took us an hour to drive less than halfway around it.
Immediately south of the flyover, there is a contemporary building with an original design, whose bold but elegant sculptural ‘façade’ consists of overlapping curved concrete slabs. This contains the Hammersmith Surgery, a medical practice. Completed in 2001, it was designed by Guy Greenfield Architects. It stands at the beginning of the road leading to Hammersmith Bridge. This suspension bridge, completed in 1887, was designed by Sir Joseph Bazalgette (1819-91). It replaced an earlier one built in 1827 but uses its predecessor’s original pier foundations. Slightly chunky in appearance, it is covered with decorative features.

Recently (about 2019), the bridge was discovered to be structurally unsound and has been closed to all users, causing much inconvenience and consternation to the many people who relied on it every day. The endangered bridge crosses Lower Mall, which runs along the Hammersmith bank of the Thames. This riverside thoroughfare and its continuation upstream, Upper Mall, is lined with buildings of historic interest.

The rowing club at number 6 Lower Mall, with its prominent first floor bow window supported on slender pillars and overlooking the river, is one of a line of several recognizably Georgian houses, all of which have been modernised to varying extents. The elegant Kent House, built in about 1782 (maybe 1762), stands west of these. Over the years it has had many owners including Mr and Mrs Thomas Hunt who used it as a seminary for young people.

The lower, modest building neighbouring Kent House, numbered 11 and 12, was built in the 17th century, but, although modernised, it retains original features. The Blue Anchor pub close-by bears the date 1722, but its present home is a more recent building, if not a highly modified version of the original. The composer Gustav Holst (1874-1934), who was Director of Music at Hammersmith’s St Pauls School for Girls, composed his “Hammersmith Suite” (1931) in the pub. Long before this piece was written, the composer lived across the river in Barnes (between 1908 and 1913). The Rutland Arms pub on Lower Mall opened in the late 1840s and was rebuilt in the 1870s. Before WW2, this building had a third floor and a pitched roof, but now it has only two beneath a flat roof.
Westcott Lodge, a modernised Georgian structure (originally built about 1746), has a porch supported by two pillars and two pilasters, all with Ionic capitals. Formerly St Paul’s vicarage, it stands on the eastern edge of Furnivall Gardens, a pleasant open space created in 1951. Before WW2, the area was covered with industrial buildings including the Phoenix Lead Mills, which stood east of The Creek, an inlet of the Thames that was filled-in in 1936. In earlier times, The Creek, which extended as far inland as today’s King Street, was centre of Hammersmith’s flourishing fishing industry. Writing in 1876, James Thorne described The Creek as follows: “… a dirty little inlet of the Thames, which is crossed by a wooden footbridge, built originally by Bishop Sherlock in 1751 … the region of squalid tenements bordering the Creek having acquired the cognomen of Little Wapping, probably from its confined and dirty character.”

The Creek is long gone, but there is a storm drain outlet in the bank of the Thames close to where The Creek emptied into the river. This can be seen from Dove Pier at the western end of the Gardens. The little bridge described by Thorne led west to the beginning of Upper Mall. Before looking at that thoroughfare, follow the path to the busy A4, across which can be seen the façade of Hammersmith Town Hall. Built 1938-39 beside the former Creek, it was designed by E Berry Webber (1896-1963), an architect best-known for his civic buildings.

A narrow passage forms the eastern part of Upper Mall. Sussex House, brick-built and well-hidden behind its garden’s fencing, was built in the early 18th century (about 1726) on the site of an earlier 17th century house. Despite its name, it is unlikely that the Duke of Sussex (1773–1843), who laid the foundation stone of the first Hammersmith Bridge, lived here. Across the passage from this house, there is another whose shuttered ground-floor windows resemble a shop front. This building is part of, or attached to, number 15 Upper Mall. The latter bears a plaque recording that Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson (1840-1922), the printer and bookbinder, founded his Doves Bindery and Doves Press in this building, where he also lived. Involved in the Arts and Crafts Movement, he was a friend of its great proponent William Morris, who lived and worked close by. Thomas was married to Anne, daughter of the radical Richard Cobden (1804-1865). Along with his sometime business partner, the engraver and printer Emery Walker (see below), Thomas developed a new typeface. When they fell out, Thomas dumped all the font’s casting punches and matrices for their new font into the Thames, and they were lost until some of it was recovered in was discovered below the water in 2015.
A quaint riverside pub, The Dove, is a few steps west. Beginning life as ‘Doves Coffee House’ in the late 18th century, it became a pub by the early 19th century. To its east, its neighbour is The Seasons, a narrower building with wide, tall windows overlooking the river. The Seasons might have been built as a ‘smoking box’ (a place to enjoy tobacco) for the Duke of Sussex.

The Dove pub is joined to a larger building with a rooftop balustrade (best viewed from the river or from Dove Pier). This 18th century building is number 21, Sunderland Cottage, where William Morris housed the hand-operated Albion press used for printing an edition of Chaucer. Prior to that (in 1867), the house was used by T Day, a coal merchant. The author George Borrow (1803-1881) was one of his customers in 1864.

River House, number 24, was built in the mid-17th century. When Catherine of Braganza (1638-1705) lived in Hammersmith (in 1685 after her husband King Charles II died), some of her servants lived in this house. Its western neighbour, a much larger brick building, built in the 1780s, is now called Kelmscott House. Constructed on the site of an old warehouse, this became the home of Sir Francis Ronalds (1788-1873) in the early 19th century. Sir Francis, an inventor, laid eight miles of insulated electrical cable in the house’s extensive garden, which in his time stretched as far inland as King Street, and with that he demonstrated the use of telegraphy for the first time in history in 1816. When he reported his discovery to Lord Melville, the First Lord of The Admiralty, he was told (by Melville) that telegraphs were totally unnecessary, because the semaphore did the job of communication just as well.

In 1878, Ronalds’ house, known then as ‘The Retreat’, was bought by the writer and artist William Morris (1834-1896), a leading exponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement and social reformer. It was renamed Kelmscott House (the name of Morris’s dwelling in Oxfordshire). Morris and his family lived in this large house, which also served as a meeting place for his many artistic and socialist friends and acquaintances.

It was at Morris’s house, according to the composer Imogen Holst (1907-1984), that her father, the composer Gustav Holst:
“...began to hear about Socialism, and after reading several books by William Morris he joined the Hammersmith Socialist Club and listened to Bernard Shaw's lectures at Kelmscott House. Here he found a new sort of comradeship, and here he became aware of other ways of searching for beauty.... His socialism was never very active, and although he admired William Morris as a man, he found that the glamour of his romantic Medievalism soon wore off. But he remained in the club for the sake of good companionship, and in 1897 he accepted an invitation to conduct the Socialist Choir.”

The house’s interior is decorated with wallpapers designed by Morris and his company, as well as with oriental carpets. There are also textiles woven to his designs. Today, the house, which is owned by the William Morris Society, is leased to private tenants. The long narrow coach house attached to the west side of Kelmscott House was used as a lecture hall in William Morris’s time. It hosted many meetings of groups sympathetic to socialism, including that which Morris joined in 1883: the ‘Democratic Federation’, later known as the ‘Social Democratic Federation’. Like some of today’s leading British socialists, Morris was also far wealthier than the people whom he hoped to help with his left-wing political sympathies.

Today, the coach house, which bears a plaque in memory of Sir Francis Ronalds, houses the offices of the William Morris Society and a small museum. On the ground floor, there are a few chairs set in front of a screen where a short, informative film about Morris is shown. In the basement, there is a shop and two rooms full of exhibits. Most of them relate to Morris, but there is also a bust of Sir Francis. What particularly interested me was a temporary exhibit describing Morris’s interest in oriental carpets. It was he who persuaded the Victoria and Albert Museum to purchase (in 1893 for £2000) the now priceless 16th century Persian Ardabil carpet (Morris described it being of “singular perfection ... logically and consistently beautiful”), as well as other fine woven carpets from Persia. In another room, there stands a well-preserved example of a hand-operated printing press used by Morris’s printers. Next to it, there are racks of movable type ready to be set in the press. Seeing this, reminded me of my days at Highgate School in north London in the 1960s, where I helped print the school calendars using remarkably similar equipment. The staff at the museum were friendly and knowledgeable.
Further west, Rivercourt House (number 36 Upper Mall), a large brick building topped with a balustrade facing the river, was built in 1808. In its grounds stood a house where the Queen Dowager, Catherine of Braganza, lived whilst she was in Hammersmith. The ruins of this were pulled down at the time the present house was built. Naomi Mitchison (1897-1999), the novelist, socialist, and feminist, lived here with her family between 1923 and ’39. One of her children is the famous immunologist Avrion Mitchison, who worked and taught at University College London, my ‘alma mater’. Today, the house and its newer neighbour to the west of it contain The Latymer Prep School.

Between 1931 and ’35, the artist and print-maker Eric Ravilious (1903-1942) lived in the house on the east corner of Upper Mall and Weltje Road. ‘Weltje’ might refer to a place with a WW1 cemetery near Ypres in Belgium. Or, more likely, it could refer to the actor (and/or confectioner of German origin) Lewis Weltje (1745-1810), who lived in Hammersmith, and died in the late 18th century. In 1781, he founded a club in Mayfair, which was noted for gambling and extravagant entertainments.

Weltje Road crosses part of the garden of the now demolished Seagreens House, which was owned by Weltje. West of this, Linden House is set back from the river. This grand building with a central pediment was constructed as a residence in about 1733. In the late 19th century, it was home to St Katherine’s College for Girls, then after WW1, it was used as a social club by the bakery firm Lyons & Co Ltd. Today, it houses the London Corinthian Sailing Club and the Sons of The Thames Rowing Club.

Next, we pass two pubs. The Old Ship is truly old. There has been a hostelry on its site since the early 18th century. West of that, and set back from the riverfront, is the Black Lion. It is housed in a much-modified late 18th century building and has pleasant gardens, where I have enjoyed drinks on warm summer’s evenings. This pub was one of many Thames-side inns, where the once popular game of skittles was played seriously as late as after WW2. The pub’s skittle alley exists no longer.
Hammersmith Terrace is separated from the river by a row of terraced houses, which were built in the third quarter of the 18th century. They vary in design, but all have attractive front porches. Edward Johnston (1872-1944) lived at number 3 between 1905 and 1912. Born in Uruguay of Scottish parentage, he was an important modern calligrapher. In 1916, he designed the type of font, which, with small modifications made recently, is still used for the lettering on London’s Underground. In addition, he was responsible for modifying the system’s logo to look as it does today: a circle with a horizontal bar crossing it.

From 1903 to 1933, number 8 was home to the typographer and antiquary Sir Emery Walker (1851-1933). An exponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement, he was a friend of William Morris. Walker’s collection of antique typefaces inspired Morris to set up his Kelmscott Press, which attempted to revive the aesthetics of the early era of European printing and illuminated manuscripts. After Morris died, Walker formed the Dove Press with Cobden Sanderson (see above). As already described, they fell out. Walker’s house now houses a museum, which I have not yet visited. Like Morris, Emery was a member, and one-time branch secretary, of the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League. After meetings held in the coach house at Kelmscott House, Morris used to invite the speaker and the audience to have dinner in his home. Emery was usually present at these meals.

Sir Alan Patrick Herbert (1890-1971), writer, Member of Parliament, and law reformer, lived at number 12, whose porch is supported by Doric columns. A member of the Thames Conservancy and author of books about the river, he lived and died there.

The Terrace leads west into Chiswick Mall, a small stretch of which is in the Borough of Hammersmith. Before the boundary of the borough is reached, we pass some 20th century houses. Soon after entering the Borough of Hounslow, there is a quaint house, Mall Cottage, with a neo gothic front door and windows framed by gothic arches.
Continuing along Chiswick Mall, we pass the tapering eastern end of Chiswick Eyot. It is the easternmost island in the Thames apart from the Isle of Sheppey, which is 44 miles east in the Thames estuary. In the past, this spindle-shaped islet was used for the cultivation of osiers (willows with long flexible shoots used in basket and furniture making). One of the houses facing the island is the over ornate heavily stuccoed Island House with Ionic pillars and Corinthian pilasters. It was built in the early 19th century. Nearby, is the appropriately named Osiers, whose stuccoed exterior hides an old structure built in the 1780s. Once a haunt of intellectual homosexuals, it was later the home of the pathologist Leonard Colebrook (1883-1967). Osiers is the most eastern of a terrace of 18th century (and earlier) buildings. Its immediate neighbour, Morton House, which was built around 1726, has had many owners and uses, including housing a school for young children in the 1920s. Before that, the artist Francis Ernest Jackson (1872–1945) lived here between 1912 and 1919 prior to moving into Mall Cottage.

Riverside House and its adjoining Cygnet House, both with pretty latticework porches, were built in the Regency period at the beginning of the 19th century. The Russian Vladimir Polunin (1880-1957), who lived in Cygnet House, not only taught at the Slade School of Art but also painted scenery for Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet. The Mall runs in front of the houses already described but is separated from the Thames by a strip of private gardens belonging to the houses. Beyond the gardens, the Eyot provides a pleasing verdant backdrop.

The tall Greenash House makes an architectural contrast with its 18th century neighbours. It was designed by John Belcher (1841-1913) and completed in 1882 for the shipbuilder Sir John Thornycroft (1843–1928), who owned a wharf just west of the nearby St Nicholas Church. It was converted into flats in 1934 by its then owner the architect Ernest Brander Musman (1888-1972), a designer of many 20th century pubs in a wide variety of architectural styles.

Staithe House, part of a Victorian terrace which would not look out of place in Belsize Park, faces the western tip of Chiswick Eyot. The house is separated from Fuller’s Griffin Brewery (building commenced 1845) by Chiswick Lane South. The brewery stands on a site where beer has been produced since the 17th century or earlier. The Lane runs along the east side of the brewery, passing a brewery retail outlet, to a row of 18th century buildings, named Mawson Row in memory of Thomas Mawson (c. 1660-1714) of Chiswick, who took over the brewery in 1685.
Near the Mawson Arms pub at the north end of the row, there is a plaque commemorating the poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Pope and his parents lived here in this row between 1716 and 1719. According to James Thorne, writing in 1876, Pope wrote portions of his translation of the “Iliad”, which appeared between 1715 and 1720, on the backs of letters addressed to him in the (then named) ‘New Buildings’ in Chiswick. Pope’s father died in this row of buildings in 1717 and is buried in the nearby churchyard.

Back on the Mall, immediately west of the brewery buildings, there is a building named Red Lion House. It was formerly a pub, the ‘Red Lion’, built in the 18th century. This, I was told by a passer-by, went out of business because of the reduced demand for alcohol following the legislation of pub opening hours that was introduced in WW1 (i.e., The Defence of The Realm Act of 1914). In its heyday, the pub was used by bargemen and, also, osier cutters, who sharpened their knives on a whetstone that used to hang by its entrance.

Thamesview and its neighbour Lingard House are both 18th century and were originally parts of a single building. The illustrator and engraver Robert Sargent Austin (1895-1973), who advised on the design of British banknotes in the late 1950s, lived in Lingard. Frederick William Tuke (1858 - 1935), who helped his brothers run a mental asylum in Chiswick, lived in Thamesview in the late 19th century. Next door to Lingard House is Said House, whose façade is dominated by an overly large bay window. The building’s earliest structures date back to the 18th century, but much has been done since to distort its original appearance. One of its early inhabitants was an artist, Katherine Parsons. The actor and theatre manager Sir Nigel Playfair (1874-1935) also lived there. The origin of the house’s name is uncertain, but one source suggests that it is so-called because its title deeds refer to “the said house”.

Eynham House and Bedford House (adjoining it) provide pleasant visual compensation for their comparatively unappealing neighbour Said House. Originally, the two houses were parts of a single house, whose construction dates to the 17th century. The façade of the house(s) with its harmonious bow windows is 18th century and surmounted by a graceful pediment. One of the owners of Bedford House was John Sich (c1751-1836), who owned the nearby, now defunct, Lamb Brewery, which was founded in the last quarter of the 18th century. There are sculpted heads above the ground floor windows of his former home.
The first two storeys of the nearby austere brick building, Woodroffe House, were built in the early 18th century, and the third added later. The sculptor Wilfred Dudeny (1911-1996) lived there from about 1963 onwards. Chiswick Mall ends just west of this building, and the roadway continues northwards as Church Street. At the corner, stands a house (pre-18th century, but much modified), The Old Vicarage. Opposite it, a slipway runs down into the river. It has been there a long time and is marked on a detailed map surveyed in 1867. Near it, opposite the Red Lion Pub, this same map marks a ferry that ran from the pub, around the western tip of the Eyot, to the southern bank of the Thames.

Close to the landward end of the slipway (near the vicarage), there is what looks like a pair of oversized interlocking, rusting chain links with nuts and bolts. This is a cast-iron sculpture, “Couplet”, made by Charles Hadcock (born 1965) in 1999. The work of art, which reminded me of the works that my late mother, a sculptress, might have made. It stands beside the gateway into the churchyard of St Nicholas. Nicholas, whose church is beside the Thames and near at least two breweries, is patron saint for fishermen, sailors, and cooper (barrel-makers).

The idyllic, romantic, leafy churchyard by the river is chock full of graves. Two of them caught my attention. One is that for the artist William Hogarth, who lived close-by. His monument, protected by a cast-iron fence, an urn on a plinth decorated with an artist’s palette and brushes, was erected after the death of his sister in 1781 (who is also commemorated on this monument), and was restored by a William Hogarth of Aberdeen in 1856. The other grave that I found interesting was a monument to the Italian poet and patriot Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827). He spent the last eleven years of his life in England. He died at Turnham Green, and was buried in the graveyard at St Nicholas. In 1871, the poet’s remains were removed to Italy, which had recently achieved Unification and Independence. They were interred in the church of Santa Croce in Florence.

There has been a church on the site of St Nicholas since before the 12th century. The tower of the present building was begun in the 15th century. Its south face has a small, picturesque gargoyle with prominent eyebrows and bulging eyes. The rest of the church was rebuilt in the late 19th century in Victorian gothic style.
Moving away from the water’s edge, the large Ferry House on Church Street and some of its neighbours were built in the 18th century. Even older is the half-timbered Old Burlington, once an old coaching inn, whose construction began in the 16th century. Close to this, there is a building on a corner plot with timber-cladding and a ground-floor bow window. This was once The Lamb pub. Established by about 1732, it became the brewery pub for Sich & Co brewery. It closed in 1909. It achieved fame in 1889 because it was here that an inquest was held into the death by drowning of a Jack the Ripper suspect, Montague John Druitt. The buildings that housed Sich’s brewery, the Lamb Brewery, can be seen behind the former pub. The brewery was leased to the brewers John Sich and William Thrale in 1790. Brewing ceased in the early 20th century. The premises were then used until 1952 by the Standard Yeast Company, and now they have been converted into offices, studios, and flats.
Chiswick has been a centre for brewing since early times, since at least the 13th century when many of the local inhabitants owed taxes for making malt. Earlier than that, by the 11th century, Chiswick was known for cheese making. Its earlier name, the Old English ‘Ceswican’, meant ‘cheese farm’. By the late 16th century, there was already at least one brewery in the area. Fuller’s brewery is the last of these to survive.

Number 6 Church Street has a large disused shopfront with central double doors and decorative masonry brackets at each end of the former fascia. This building was marked as a ‘Post Office’ on old (pre-WW2) maps. It is almost opposite Pages Yard, a cul-de-sac lined with 18th century brick houses with luxuriant gardens.

The north end of historic Church Street opens abruptly into the world of modern-day life in the form of the busy Great West Road dual carriageway. Most people, either whizzing along this road or stuck in a traffic jam, probably do not take much notice of the historic George and Devonshire pub, which has been in business since the 1650s, although its present home dates from the 18th century. Its neighbour Chiswick Square is dominated by the elegant Boston House (which should not be confused with nearby Boston Manor). The architectural historian Pevsner compares the design of this building, erected in the 1740s, to London’s Albany (in Piccadilly). Its name probably derives from Viscount Boston, Earl of Grantham (died 1754), who lived there. The buildings on the other two sides of the square, whose north side has no buildings, are late 17th century.

Putting Boston House behind you, one cannot avoid seeing a stream of vehicles ascending the slope of the western end of the slender flyover that carries traffic eastward above the Hogarth Roundabout. St Marys Convent, a short distance west of Chiswick Square, was designed by Charles Ford Whitcombe (1872-1930), who emigrated to Australia in 1916. It was constructed in 1896 and displays some architectural details typical of the Arts and Craft Movement. Over the years, it has been considerably enlarged to become a hospital.
Paxton Road, which leads northwest from the Convent runs alongside the grounds of Chiswick House. It is lined by 19th century ‘villas’, which in this context mean mundane terraced houses. On the corner of Paxton and Short Roads, there is a house with extensive ground floor windows separated by orange tiling and surmounted by what might once have been + shop (or pub) fascia boarding above. It is more likely to have been a shop than a pub because no pub is marked on old maps of Paxton Road. Now, it is residential.

Paxton Road becomes Sutherland Road at its northern end, and the latter leads to the busy Great West Road (A4), known at this point as Hogarth Lane. This is no longer a country lane, but a six-lane highway. When the artist William Hogarth (1697-1764) moved to Chiswick in 1749, the house he bought, which still stands today, was surrounded by quiet countryside. This building constructed between 1713 and 1717 is now bordered by the busy A4 and is only a few yards from the Hogarth Roundabout. The house, which cost all of £7, was run-down when Hogarth bought it. Like so many people who buy run-down properties abroad today in picturesque places like Andalucía and Tuscany, Hogarth restored and extended it. For example, he added the first-floor oriel window that projects over the front door. It became his country retreat, away from the bustle of Leicester Fields (now Leicester Square) where he lived and worked much of the time.

During WW2, Hogarth’s home, which had become a museum, suffered bomb damage. This was repaired, and by 1951 the museum, having been extended, was re-opened to the public. When I visited it in October 2017, the upper floor was closed because work was being done to repair damage that had occurred in the ceilings. There was not too much to be seen in the two ground floor rooms. One of them is wood-panelled and feels and looks like the living room of a friend’s house in Kensington’s Holland Street, which was built shortly after Hogarth’s home. The exhibits include a sculpture depicting the artist and several Hogarth’s prints. This place is worth visiting not because it is a wonderful museum, but because it is fun to stand where once the great artist lived, and, also, because it is interesting to see inside a house of this vintage, which is neither a palace nor a stately home. The house has a pleasant garden with a large lawn and trees. According to the website of The William Hogarth Trust:
“The Hogarths extended the house and enjoyed the fruit trees and nut walk in the walled garden – the mulberry can still be seen. Pets were buried in one corner and Hogarth had a ‘painting room’ at the bottom of the garden where he was working until a few days before his death.”

Returning from Hogarth’s house to the slipway near to the church of St Nicholas, we can continue our way upstream.

DUKES MEADOWS

After walking from the churchyard of St Nicholas along a riverside pathway, which passes several recent, moderately attractive, but probably immoderately priced, housing estates, we reach Chiswick Pier at Corney Reach. Its name commemorates Corney House, where the ageing Queen Elizabeth I was entertained (in 1602) by the Sir William Russell (from 1603, 1st Baron Russell of Thornhaugh; died 1613), a son of the 2nd Earl of Bedford, who owned the place. A house was standing there by the reign of Henry VIII. It was replaced several times and its last ‘reincarnation’ was demolished by the middle of the 19th century. Several lovely old houseboats are moored next to the pier. Near the jetty there is a noticeboard explaining the history of each of these vessels.

Soon after this, the riverside path enters Dukes Meadows. Up to Barnes Bridge, which is a combined rail and pedestrian crossing over the river, the meadows form a grassy promenade running parallel to the Thames. Beyond the bridge, the meadows widen out and extend to Great Chertsey Road that crosses Chiswick Bridge.
The history of Dukes Meadows is recorded in a detailed essay by Gillian Clegg, from which I have extracted some of the following. In the past, the Meadows were low lying farmland and orchards prone to occasional flooding. The land was owned by the Dukes of Devonshire and cultivated by the Jessop family, then later farmed by John Smith of Grove Farm. Incidentally, one of the Dukes, William, the 5th Duke of Devonshire (1748-1811), had owned nearby Chiswick House in the 18th century. He had both enlarged the house (in 1788) and extended its grounds. So, at one time, the grounds of Chiswick House must have neighboured the Dukes Meadows. Ms Clegg noted that it was miraculous that the meadows survived as such, considering the plans that were proposed for making use of them during the early 20th century.

Two plans were conceived for the ‘development’ of Dukes Meadow. The first was a housing scheme that was to be named ‘Burlingwick’. Clegg wrote:

“On 19 April 1902 The Times newspaper reported that ‘an influential body of capitalists’ had negotiated successfully with the Duke of Devonshire for 330 acres of land for a building plan to be called Burlingwick. The promoter, manager and developer of this scheme was Jonathan Carr, the developer of Bedford Park.”

Had this gone ahead, it would have created housing for up to 400,000 people and 330 acres of green land would have been lost to bricks and mortar. Fortunately, for reasons that are not now too clear, the scheme was abandoned in about 1906.

1914 saw the next threat to the Meadows. The Brentford Gas Company planned to cover 80 acres of the Meadows with a huge gasworks. The people of Chiswick and other areas raised strong objections. The London “Times” of 6th February 1914 published its doubts about the scheme, which it said went against all the principles of good town planning, suggesting:

“…that land ripe for building – such as the Chiswick orchard farm – near the heart of the metropolis should be utilized for parks and garden settlement.”

The plan was scrapped, but what the “Times” had alluded to was later realised, but in a then novel way.
In 1923, the local council bought 200 acres of land from the then Duke of Devonshire. The land was to be used as a public recreation area complete with a riverside promenade, a bandstand, and a children’s area with paddling pools. All of this cost the council much money. To recoup some of what they had spent, they made an agreement with the Riverside Sand and Ballast Group. As Ms Clegg explained, the company:
“…was allowed to extract at least five acres every year in exchange for £1,500 an acre.”

The extraction of gravel proceeded from 1924 until 1937 and caused considerable damage to the area. Ms Clegg explained that when the land was finally returned to the council in 1948:
“The gravel pits were filled in, mainly with rubbish brought from inner London, and the area re-landscaped. Dukes Meadows has been described as one of the earliest and most impressive examples of restoration.”

Today, the promenade remains but I have not visited either the children’s play area or the paddling pools, which still exist. The bandstand, which stands within a sunken circle lined with steps, on which the audience can sit, has a hexagonal tiled roof supported by six plain pillars. It is flanked on two sides by spacious wooden shelters, also with tiled roofs. All their roofs are designed so that the angle (or degree) of pitch reduces noticeably about two thirds of the way from the top. Judging by their appearance, I would guess that these structures were built back in the early 1920s. This is confirmed by their appearance in a photograph taken during those years. Also visible in this picture are the unusual, twisted railings, looking like sugar-candy, running alongside the water, and supported by concrete posts with rounded tops. These are still in place today as are their concrete supports which bear simple decorative patterns. Some balustrading can be seen lining the waterfront near the bandstand, as will be mentioned below.

Part of the promenade leading towards Barnes Bridge from the Chiswick end of the Meadow is arranged in the form of two long steps. I have no idea why, but maybe they were once used by spectators watching boat races on the river. An article written in 1924 describes the popularity the Meadow with people watching the annual university boat race:
“…in fact so many thousands of people availed themselves of this vantage point last Saturday week at the small admission fee charged by the Council, that over £1,000 net was raised towards the promenade project.”
However, currently a line of bushes obscures sight of both the river and the suburb of Barnes on the other side of it from these steps. A planning document produced in November 1923 sheds a little light on these steps: “The Scheme, which received the first prize and was submitted by MR A. V. Elliot, of Chiswick, is reproduced on this page. It shows a series of terraces with a plateau of turf, showing seats and rustic shrubberies at intervals, and with a central feature of a bandstand and stone balustrading including a flight of steps and a causeway admitting to the river at all states of the tide.”

It is enjoyable to stroll along the Dukes Meadow. On the way back along the Thames Path to Hammersmith, we stopped at a charming Italian eatery and delicatessen on Chiswick Mall. The place, which is run by Sicilians, is called Mari Deli & Dining, and merits a visit to enjoy a good espresso, at the very least.

Before leaving the Thames riverside, Isleworth is another of many more places worth visiting along the river to the west of central London.
ISLEWORTH

HOLY SMOKE BY THE THAMES

The tower can be seen from far away. From a distance, the visitor to Old Isleworth on the River Thames might be fooled into believing that the 14th century square church tower topped with four pinnacles, one at each corner, is attached to an equally venerable church, but this is no longer the case. The mediaeval tower is almost all that remains of the old church of All Saints in Isleworth. It is attached to a twentieth century structure that now serves as the church. When I saw this, I wondered what disaster had befallen the rest of the original pre-20th century church.

The origin of the name Isleworth is unknown. In the Domesday Book, it is listed as ‘Gistelworde’ and Norden, writing in 1591, named it both ‘Thistleworth’ and ‘Istleworth’. Simon de Montfort (c1205-1265), who expelled the Jews from Leicester in 1231, and his barons are known to have camped in Isleworth Park in 1263. The Domesday Book records that there was Christian worship in Isleworth and a vicarage is mentioned in records compiled in 1290. The church, whose tower is still standing, was dedicated to ‘All saints’ in 1485 and was connected to Syon Abbey, a Bridgettine establishment, founded in 1415 in Isleworth, which was disbanded by Henry VIII. Interestingly, it was in the Abbey’s chapel that the body of Henry VIII lay overnight on its journey from Westminster to St Georges Chapel in Windsor. The abbey stood where Syon House (constructed 1547) stands today. It was in this house that the tragically short-lived Lady Jane Grey (c1536-1554) was forcibly encouraged to become Queen of England. The gardens of Syon House are well worth visiting, as they contain a magnificent, glass-domed early 19th century conservatory (completed 1827 to the designs of Charles Fowler [1792-1867]), a forerunner of those that can be seen at Kew Gardens.
Isleworth Church is said to have been ‘very ancient’. Its chancel was rebuilt in 1398-99. By 1701, the church was in a poor condition and needed rebuilding. Christopher Wren, architect of London’s St Paul’s Cathedral, was invited to redesign the church. His design was deemed too costly to be carried out and was discarded. Eventually, the churchwardens brought out Wren’s plans and modified them to make the construction of the church more economical. James Thorne, author of “Handbook to the Environs of London” (published 1876), wrote that:

“Apart from its ivy-covered tower, there could not well have been an uglier church than that of Isleworth a few years ago…”

However, he added:

“...but it has been transformed, the windows altered, a new roof of higher pitch, and a lofty white-brick Dec. [i.e. gothic revival] chancel added, greatly to the benefit of the general effect.”

He described many improvements to its interior and noted the existence of a fine organ built by Father Schmidt (Bernard Schmidt [c1630-1708]). Alas, none of what Thorne described, apart from the tower, can ever be seen again.

Except for the tower, the church was destroyed by fire in 1943 during WW2. The fire was not the result of military activity but was caused by two young boys. These same two miscreants had also set fire to Holy Trinity Church in Hounslow a few days later. This is what happened:

“In the early hours of Friday, 28th May 1943, All Saints Church, standing by the Thames in Old Isleworth, was destroyed by fire. The alarm was given at 2.30am by Miss Burrage who lived next door and again by Mr. McDonald, the publican of the “London Apprentice”. Against the darkness of the wartime black-out the glow of the huge fire could be seen for miles. Three days later, on the afternoon of Tuesday 1st of June 1943, the Parish Church of Hounslow (Holy Trinity) was completely destroyed by fire. Shortly after 5.00pm smoke was reported to be issuing from the church … The police noted that an attempt had been made to open the church safe…”

Two boys, one aged 12 and the other 13, were arrested and tried at Brentford in the old courthouse, which is now home to a restaurant/café called The Verdict. These two youngsters had been in court several times before for crimes of petty theft.

In court, they admitted:

“…that they only set fire to the churches out of spite and only if they found no money to steal. They told the chairman Mr. A. J. Chard J.P, how easy it was to break into churches and how easy it was to burn them down. At the Mission Hall they set fire to the curtains. At Broadway Baptist Church they set eight separate fires. At Holy Trinity it was five. The older boy also confessed to burning down a haystack in a coal yard a year earlier.”
The two arsonists were sent to approved schools. The Chairman of the Court recommended:
“…to the Home Office that the two lads should go to separate schools and that the schools should be of the strictest kind; further, that they should be kept there for the full period of three years.”

All Saints Church was rebuilt yet again in 1970 to the designs of architect Michael Blee (1931-1996), who built several churches. From the outside it is quite an attractive structure alongside the mediaeval tower and an old (?) sundial.

While wandering around the church, two things caught my eye. One is a stone placed close to a large yew tree in the churchyard. The stone informs that the yew tree is growing upon the site where 49 people, who died in the Great Plague of 1665, were buried. The other feature that interested me was a group of stones set in the wall surrounding the churchyard. Each of these records the level to which water reached when the Thames flooded on various years between 1774 and 1965. The building of The Thames Barrier, completed in 1984, brought an end to these flooding events.

All Saints Church stands a few yards away from the riverbank from where there are wonderful views of the Thames and Isleworth Ait (an island) and a rich selection of waterfowl swimming in the river. Given how close the old part of Isleworth is to suburban west London, it has a remarkably rustic feeling, and is a peaceful place. Near the church, overlooking the river, there are several houses, which must be well over 150 years old. There is also a pub, ‘The London Apprentice’, which was established by the 1730s, and has a veranda which affords a fine view of the Ait and the river.

After enjoying the view across the River Thames from Old Isleworth and seeing the church, my eye alighted on a house with a circular memorial plaque placed to remember someone of significance, of whom I had never heard. Arthur Joseph Penty (1875-1937) lived at 59 Church Street in Isleworth between 1926 and his death. The commemorative plaque bears the words: “Architect and pioneer of Guild Socialism”. Penty was born in York, eldest of the two sons of the architect Walter Green Penty (1852-1902) of York. Arthur first worked in his father’s architectural practice before moving to London in 1902, where he increased his involvement in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Shortly before his move, he met Alfred Richard Orage (1873-1934). He was an influential British socialist and a Theosophist. He edited a journal called “The New Age”, which was inspired by Fabian Socialism.
In London, Penty collaborated with the architect Raymond Unwin, who was responsible for much of the planning and design of Hampstead Garden Suburb, whose construction began in about 1904. Penty, working in Unwin’s office, is believed to have designed some of the details of two large buildings, Temple Fortune House and Arcade House, in Temple Fortune, as well as aspects of the so-called ‘Great Wall’ that separates part of the Suburb from the northern edge of Hampstead Heath Extension.

Apart from architecture, Penty was an important exponent of Guild Socialism. Many of his thoughts on the subject were published in Orage’s “The New Age”. I had never heard of Guild Socialism before seeing Penty’s house in Isleworth. Let me see if I can make any sense of this now long-outdated form of socialism, whose ideas were influenced by the great designer William Morris and his associates. Guild Socialism opposed capitalism.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Guild Socialism is:
“…a movement that called for workers’ control of industry through a system of national guilds operating in an implied contractual relationship with the public.”

It began in 1906 with the publication of “The Restoration of the Gild System”, written by Penty. The Guild Socialists believed that industry should be owned by the state but controlled by workers through national guilds organised by their members democratically. The system proposed was a kind of nostalgic revival of the mediaeval guild system. During WW1, Guild Socialism was enhanced by the actions of left-wing shop stewards demanding ‘workers’ control’ of the war industries. The movement declined with the onset of the economic slump of 1921 and the subsequent policies of both the Labour and Socialist Parties in Great Britain. As Penty neared the end of his life, he became attracted to the ideas of fascism that were prevalent in the Europe of the 1930s. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography reveals that by the early 1930s, Penty:
“... was attracted to the anti-modernism of the far right. He admired the corporatist economic organization of Mussolini's Italy, supported the nationalists in the Spanish Civil War, and interested himself in the ideas of Oswald Mosley. At the same time he denounced Italian imperialism in Abyssinia and rejected Nazism for its racial doctrines and its statism.”
Penty, who dedicated his life to the revival of mediaeval craftsmanship and
guilds, died at 59 Church Street in Old Isleworth on the 19th of January
1937. This late 18th century building bears the name “Manor House”.
According to one source, this is neither the manor house nor is it on the site
of a former manor house. It was bought by Arthur’s son, Michael Penty,
who also purchased the (titular) Manor of Isleworth. His name is on the
front door, along with a brass plate bearing the words: “MICHAEL
PENTY Solicitor & Commissioner for Oaths. LORD OF THE MANOR
OF ISLEWORTH RECTORY”

A short walk away from The London Apprentice, we arrive at the lower
reach the Eastern Section of The Duke of Northumberland’s River, a man-
made waterway. Constructed in the 16th century, it takes water from the
River Crane (a tributary of the Thames) through the gardens of Syon Park
to the Thames at Isleworth. Its water was also used to drive mills on the
estate of the Dukes of Northumberland, who still own Syon House.

Old Isleworth is a charming spot on the Thames with several fine old
houses and many acceptable new ones. At the waterfront, one could easily
feel that the place is hundreds of miles away from a big city if it were not
for the seemingly endless stream of low-flying aircraft coming into land at
nearby Heathrow Airport.
By now, you might feel like having a rest from rivers and canals. So, we will turn our attention to something different. Before the 19th century, London ended abruptly at the eastern edge of what is now Hyde Park. West of that was countryside dotted with villages and small towns like Acton, Kensington, Chelsea, Fulham, Hammersmith, and Isleworth.

In addition to these settlements, there were numerous country estates owned by the landed gentry. A few of them will be considered next. Some of them are in pristine condition and others are not.
FORMER COUNTRY ESTATES

A PIGEON ON HIS HEAD

The first former country house we will examine is now in ruins. It is located close to the old metropolis, on the edge of the old village of Kensington.

Seated in a chair on a stone plinth, surrounded by a small pond and often with a pigeon on his head or shoulder, Henry Vassall-Fox, 3rd Baron Holland (‘Lord Holland’; 1773-1840) gazes benevolently towards the ruins of his home, an early Jacobean mansion with two wings. It was built in 1607 when it was then known as ‘Cope Castle’, named after its first owner Sir Walter Cope (c1553-1614). It passed into the hands of his daughter Isabel, who married the Royalist Henry Rich, 1st Earl of Holland (1590-1649). Tragically, much of it was destroyed by German bombs during WW2.

The fine cast metal statue of Lord Holland was sculpted by George Frederic Watts (1817-1914) with technical assistance from Joseph Edgar Boehm (1834-1890). Watts was also the creator of the equestrian sculpture “Physical Energy” located in Kensington Gardens across the Serpentine from a sculpture by Henry Moore. I have walked past Holland’s statue innumerable times and never given it much of a thought apart from being amused when I have seen birds resting on the crown of his head. A friend pointed out that the sculptor had included, unusually, a depiction of Holland’s wedding ring, a memorial to his marriage, which was to prove remarkably interesting in connection with his political activities. One June day in 2020, I walked past it yet again, but with the then recent interest in statues and their subjects’ relationships with the slave trade, I wondered whether Lord Holland had any connection with it. What I discovered was surprising.

Lord Holland was the nephew of the Whig statesman Charles James Fox (1749-1806). According to the British History Online website:
“On the death of his uncle … Lord Holland was introduced into the
Cabinet as Lord Privy Seal; but the strength of the Whig portion of the
Government had then departed, and the only measure worthy of notice in
which his lordship co-operated after his accession to office was the Bill for
the Abolition of the Slave Trade.”

This suggests that Holland was an abolitionist. However, things are not so
simple. When visiting Florence (Italy) in 1793, he fell in love with
Elizabeth Vassall, wife of Sir Godfrey Webster, 4th Baronet. She and
Webster divorced and then Elizabeth married Lord Holland. The “Oxford
Dictionary of National Biography” (‘DNB’) records that in 1800:
“… Holland assumed the additional name of Vassall to safeguard his
children’s right to his wife's West Indian fortune.”
When Elizabeth’s first husband died in 1800, Lord Holland became the
owner of the Vassall plantations in Jamaica. By accident, the abolitionist
became an owner of slaves.

According to a website published by the Portobello Carnival Film Film Festival
in 2008:
“By all accounts, the Hollands were humane and improving proprietors
who supported anti-slavery measures against their own financial interests.
It can even be argued that he was more use to the abolitionist movement as
a slave owner than he would have been as a mere politician. Nevertheless,
in perhaps the defining local paradox, the finest hour of Holland House as
the international salon of liberal politics was financed by the profits of slave labour.”
The site continues by pointing out that after Fox, his uncle, died, Lord
Holland:
“… was on the committee that framed his uncle’s bill for the abolition of
the slave trade. Meanwhile Lady Holland founded the area’s multi-cultural
tradition by employing Afro-Caribbean, Spanish and Italian servants – in
order to enhance the foreign image of her political salon.”
VE Chancellor wrote in his article “Slave-owner and anti-slaver: Henry
Richard Vassall Fox, 3rd Lord Holland, 1800–1840” that Holland regarded
a slave:
“… not as mere chattel, but as an individual with feelings and abilities no
less than those of other men …”.
However:
“… he justified the continuing history of slavery in the British Empire in
Whiggish terms of the right to property and the need to obtain the consent
of those who owned slaves before Abolition could be achieved…”
So, it seems that Holland, an avowed Abolitionist, and ‘accidental’ owner
of slaves, was placed in a difficult position. Chancellor records that the
great Abolitionist William Wilberforce (1759-1833) regarded Holland as:
“… a ‘most zealous partisan’ of slave trade abolition …”
And the DNB relates:
“Holland himself was an equally keen supporter of the abolition of slavery in 1833, despite its adverse effect on his West Indian income.”
Holland gave his full support for the Slave Trade Abolition Bill when it passed through the House of Lords. The passing of the Bill was accompanied by sizable tax relief to sugar producers in the West Indies.
Lord Holland benefitted from these, as the University College London ‘Legacies of Slave Ownership’ website notes:
“Lord Holland, awarded part of the compensation for under three awards for the enslaved people on his estates in Jamaica…”
Chancellor wrote that Holland, who had benefitted financially from the tax relief concessions:
“… learnt the lesson that those called on to make sacrifices in a good cause do so the more willingly when potential loss is compensated.”

So, returning to the statue covered with bird droppings in Holland Park, what are we to think? No doubt, Lord Holland was an owner of slaves but became one only by an accident caused by one of Cupid’s arrows. Had he married someone else, he might not have become the inheritor of Caribbean plantations with slaves. If as he did, William Wilberforce was happy to regard him as a bona-fide Abolitionist, that is for me a favourable contemporary character reference for Lord Holland. Some, including me, looking at his statue with hindsight, might ask why he, an avowed Abolitionist, did not emancipate his slaves as soon as they came into his possession. I am willing to believe that the answer to this is far from simple.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea manage Holland Park, the grounds of Holland House. The ruins of the house are ample enough to give one an idea of how wonderful the building must have been when it was intact. These ruins form part of a temporary theatre that is erected every summer for the performance of operas. While visiting the park, be sure not to miss seeing the charming Japanese style Kyoto and Fukushima Gardens as well as the old-fashioned knot garden west of the remains of the house.

Holland House was not the only country estate near Kensington. I have already mentioned Campden House, but there were several others, which have now been demolished and covered with dwelling houses. I will now describe one of these, which I discovered quite by accident.
The remains of Holland House in Holland Park

A FADED NOTICE BOARD

During the ‘lockdowns’ imposed to limit the spread of the covid19 virus in 2020, use of public transport was discouraged, as was wandering too far from home when taking exercise. While not exactly ‘confined to barracks’, the distance that we could move away from home was been limited, to the distance that we could manage to walk comfortably, without exhausting ourselves. This meant that for many weeks we were walking around our local area. A friend of ours in Dublin told us, half-jokingly, that during the Irish lockdown, he felt that he had got to know every blade of grass in his neighbourhood. I understood what he was saying. For me, greater familiarity with our immediate locality did not breed contempt for it, but the opposite. We walked along small streets we never knew existed and discovered interesting details in those thoroughfares that we thought we knew so well.
Take a couple of examples. I have been walking along Sheffield Terrace, which leads off Kensington Church Street, two or three times a week for the last 25 years, yet it was only in 2020 that I noticed a small square metal plate on the wall of a house in that thoroughfare. It recorded the fact that the author GK Chesterton was born in that house on the 29th of May 1874. A few doors away on the same street, there is a much larger and far more obvious plaque commemorating that the founder of the Church Army, Prebendary Wilson Carlile (1847-1942) had lived there. I had often noticed this memorial, but I had never noticed the far more discreet memorial to Chesterton, which looks like a simple grey wall tile from a distance.

Sheffield Terrace leads to the northern end of Hornton Street, which is marked on 19th century Ordnance Survey maps as ‘Campden House Road’, since it ran near the estate of the now demolished Campden House, which like nearby Holland House was built in the Jacobean era; it was destroyed by fire. Hornton Street leads south and downhill towards High Street Kensington. Once again, this is a street along which I have walked several times a week over a period of at least a quarter of a century. Various roads lead off Hornton Street. The short Pitt Street, which is named after a Pitt family unrelated to that of two former British Prime ministers, is one of these.

On the corner of Pitt and Hornton Streets, there is a faded rectangular sign that I had always assumed carried the words ‘Hornton Street’. However, I had not looked at it closely enough until one day during one of the ‘lockdowns’ in 2020.

I do not know what made me examine the faded sign closely, but I am glad that I did. Some of the letters on it have disappeared. The following are just about visible, and even more so on enhanced digital photographs: H, O, R, N, …, D, G, E. The last three letters are not ‘E, E, T’, which you would expect to see if the sign had read ‘Hornton Street’. I wondered if the sign had originally read ‘Hornton Lodge’. I went home and searched for ‘Hornton Lodge Kensington’ on the Google search engine.
One of the most useful things that came up amongst the Google search results was an offer on eBay for two pages of the issue of “Country Life” magazine, dated 21st of March 1968. These pages contain an article about Hornton Lodge on Pitt Street. The article bore the title “Serene Vision of a Modern Interior”. It describes the interior of a house built in 1948 on a bomb site and owned by Mr and Mrs James Melvin. The house, a long rectangular building, was called Hornton Lodge. The fading sign is all that remains of the house described in the magazine. Currently, builders are erecting a new building on the part of the plot nearest to the corner where the sign can be found. This new construction is, according to a planning application submitted in December 2019 by Nash Baker Architects, to replace an:
“… early post war semi-detached property … constructed circa 1948-49, on the site of a former villa known as ‘Hornton Lodge’. The architect/owner, James Melvin, was a partner in major architectural firm: Gollins Melvin Ward Partnership. However, at the time it was constructed, the firm was in its infancy, and this project was a modest family home for a young architect and his family; designed with modernist intentions during a time of austerity.”

I found references to a ‘Red House’ referred to in at least one web page, probably erroneously, as ‘Hornton Lodge’. The Red House was built by Stephen Bird in 1835. It was also known as ‘Hornton Villa’. This was not the property on Pitt Street demolished by a bomb in WW2 because it stood across Hornton Street opposite the western end of Holland Street, which is south of Pitt Street. A future president of the USA, Herbert Hoover, lived at that address between 1907 and 1918. Hornton Villa, The Red House, was demolished in in the 1970s, and on its site stands the architecturally undistinguished Customer Service Centre of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

There is more evidence of a Hornton Lodge, quite distinct from the Hornton Villa, mentioned above. Joseph Foster’s “Men-at-the-bar: a biographical hand-list of the members of the various Inns of Court, including Her Majesty’s judges, etc.” (published in 1885) published the address of a barrister Richard E Webster (1842-1915; called to the Bar in 1868), Lord Alverstone, as “Hornton Lodge, Pitt Street, Kensington W”. He became Attorney General between 1885 and 1886. Even earlier than that, “Allens West London Street Directory” (published in 1868) lists a ‘Theodore Aston’ as living at Hornton Lodge.
Close examination of a sign that I have passed and seen many thousands of times, assuming that it bore a simple faded street name, has revealed that I had never looked at it carefully enough before. The constriction of my field of activities to a small part of London has, to my surprise, heightened my powers of observation rather than blunted them, which could have easily happened when visiting the same locality repetitively. Soon, the faded sign on the corner of Pitt Street will either be removed or become even more illegible. I am glad I noticed this clue to the past before either of those things happen.

Before leaving Kensington, I will mention the greatest country residence in the area, Kensington Palace.

Royalty moved to Kensington when King William III bought Nottingham House in 1689 to escape from the then polluted atmosphere of London. The king commissioned the great architect Christopher Wren (1632-1723) to enlarge and largely rebuild the house to create a palace fitting for royalty. It became the residence of reigning monarchs until 1760 and later, it became a home for members of the Royal Family, which it still is. In the 1960s, part of Kensington Palace housed the Museum of London (now in the Barbican). Now, some of its rooms can be viewed by members of the public, but at a price. Instead of describing this much visited tourist attraction, well-described in guidebooks, I will take you into its fine grounds, Kensington Gardens, for a wander around a lovely body of water partly contained within them: The Serpentine.
The River Westbourne is known by few, but seen by many, who know nothing about it. Much of this tributary of the River Thames is hidden from view; it runs underground. The river rises in West Hampstead, passes through Kilburn and beneath Bayswater Road, flows through Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park, then runs into the Thames near the gardens of The Royal Hospital Chelsea, home of the annual Chelsea Flower Show, (close to the Bull Ring Gate bus stop). Observant passengers at the District and Circle Line platforms of Sloane Square Underground station will notice a large metal pipe crossing above the platforms and tracks at an oblique angle. This contains the River Westbourne as it flows towards the Thames. Nearby, Knightsbridge of Harrod’s fame, is named after a now long-since demolished bridge over the Westbourne, the Knights Bridge, which existed in early mediaeval times. It is this largely hidden river that gives rise to The Serpentine, which is enclosed both by Kensington Gardens and contiguous Hyde Park.

What I refer to as ‘The Serpentine’ is really the combination of the ‘Long Water’ in Kensington Gardens and its continuation, ‘The Serpentine’ in neighbouring Hyde Park. It occupies part of the valley of the River Westbourne and is thus the only part of this river that most people can see. The Serpentine was created between 1730 and 1733 for Queen Caroline (1683-1737), wife of King George II. The body of water was formed by linking several existing ponds fed by the River Westbourne and by water pumped from the Thames. Today, some of the water is supplied from borewells in Hyde Park.

Prior to the creation of the Serpentine, two of the ponds were separated by a building called ‘Price’s Lodge’. The “Daily Post” dated 20th of April 1733 reported that:
“The old Lodge in Hyde Park, together with part of the grove, is to be taken down in order to compleat the Serpentine River.”
Price’s Lodge, formerly known as ‘the Cheesecake House’, was a place where the nobility riding around Hyde Park could purchase refreshments. The newspaper quoted above refers to ‘The old Lodge’, which might possibly have been a separate building from Price’s Lodge, which might have still been in existence and being used as a boat house in 1801, but it was no longer standing later that century.

We begin our stroll at the end of the Serpentine across Bayswater Road, opposite Lancaster Gate Underground Station. It is near here that after flowing beneath Bayswater Road, the River Westbourne flows into the Long Water section of the Serpentine. The so-called Italian Gardens consists of four large basins or reservoirs, each with eight sides. There is a fountain in the centre of each of them and another in the middle of the four of them. The reservoirs are set on a platform adorned with sculptures and there is also a statue of Edward Jenner (1749-1823), whose work formed the foundation of something on which we are currently becoming extremely dependent: vaccination.

Jenner is depicted seated in what looks like an uncomfortable chair, resting his chin on his left hand, his left arm being supported on an armrest. The bronze statue was created by the Scottish sculptor William Calder Marshall (1813-1894). He also created the sculptural group representing ‘Agriculture’ on the nearby Albert Memorial. The Jenner sculpture was originally located in Trafalgar Square, where it was inaugurated in 1858 by Prince Albert, the Queen’s Consort three years before his demise. In 1862, the sculpture was moved to its present location in the Italian Gardens. It has three interesting details. One of these is a depiction of the Rod of Asclepius on the backrest of Jenner’s seat. The serpent entwined helically about a rod is traditionally associated with medicine and healing. Beneath the seat, there is a depiction of a cow’s head. This is appropriate symbolism given the importance of cows in the discovery of smallpox vaccination. The word ‘vaccine’ is derived from the Latin word ‘vaccinus’, which in turn is derived from ‘vacca’, the Latin for ‘cow’. There is another object depicted below the cow’s head, which I fancy, using a little imagination, might be a stylised depiction of a milk maid’s cloth hat. This detail is derived from Jenner’s experimentation based on his (and other people’s) observation that the pus from blisters that milkmaids received from cowpox protected them against the far more serious disease smallpox.
The platform supporting the Italian Gardens is about eight feet above the water level of the rest of the Serpentine. At the north end of the platform with the reservoirs and fountains, there is a decorative building with a central single chimney and roofed with Italianate tiles. Facing the fountains, the building has a loggia, a convenient shelter during a rain shower. Behind the loggia there is a large room housing machinery to pump the water that shoots out of the fountains. The four reservoirs, which make the Italian Gardens delightful, were built in 1861 and were intended to act as filter beds for the Serpentine. The loggia-cum-engine house was designed by Robert Richardson Banks (1812-1872) and Charles Barry (1823-1900). The sculptural features, including urns and nymphs, through which water flows from the Gardens into the Serpentine, were designed by John Thomas (1813-1862).

Between the Italian Gardens and Bayswater Road, there is a relatively new café, The Italian Gardens Café, which overlooks the fountains. The café is next to a neo-classical structure which contains a concavity lined with wood panelling. Made in 1705, designed by Christopher Wren (of St Pauls Cathedral fame) and bearing the crest of Queen Anne (reigned 1702-1714), this is the Queen Anne Alcove. In 1868, this decorative building was moved to its present site from near Kensington Palace, which was designed by Wren.

Moving on from the Italian Gardens southwards along the east side of the Long Water, you can, if you are lucky, spot birds such as herons and cormorants standing in the water near the opposite shore. After a short stretch along which the lake is well hidden from the path by vegetation, you reach an open space in the centre of which there is a huge sculpture made of travertine stone. This is “The Arch”, presented to the park by its creator, Henry Moore (1898-1986), in 1980. Looking through the arch and across the Serpentine you can see the equestrian sculpture “Physical Energy” by the Victorian sculptor GF Watts. The two sculptures are in line with Kensington Palace, of which there is an unobstructed view from the Moore artwork. “The Arch” is irregularly shaped because it is inspired by the form of an animal bone that the sculptor had in his possession. A path leads away from the Serpentine to the Serpentine Sackler art gallery, which is often worth visiting both for its exhibits and its well-conserved architecture. It is housed in what was once a gunpowder store, built in 1805. Next to it, there is an adventurously designed café created by the Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid (1950-2016). However, we will ignore that and continue to follow the Long Water in a south easterly direction.
Soon, we reach an elegant masonry bridge with five arches spanning the water. This was built in the 1820s to the designs of John Rennie junior (1794-1874), son of John Rennie, who designed the first Waterloo Bridge. The foot path around the Serpentine passes under each end of the bridge through semi-circular stone-lined tunnels. The bridge marks the boundary not only between Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park but also between the Long Water and the Serpentine.

Walking along what has become the north shore of the water because of the bend in the Serpentine, you will pass numerous waterfowl, including swans, gulls, ducks, coots, moorhens, geese, and cormorants. Step carefully to avoid their squidgy droppings along the footway. As you approach the modernistic Serpentine Bar and Kitchen (designed as ‘The Dell’ by Patrick Gwynne [1913-2003] and built in 1964) at the eastern end of the lake, you will pass two boat houses and a shed where in normal times, small pedal-operated boats may be hired by visitors. Look away from these boat houses towards the parkland north of the water and you will spot a roughly hewn monumental stone, a granite boulder. This is the Norwegian War Memorial, presented by the Norwegian Navy and Merchant Fleet in 1978. On one side it bears the words: “You gave us a safe haven in our common struggle for freedom and peace”, and on another: “Worked and shaped by forces of nature for thousands of years”, which refers to the stone itself.

An ugly black drinking fountain stands close to the boat houses. Marked on the park map as “Lutyens drinking fountain”, this was one of several similar fountains designed in 1950 by “Messrs Lutyens & Greenwood”. As the architect of New Delhi and Hampstead Garden Suburb, Edwin Lutyens, died in 1944, I imagine that the Lutyens who designed this ugly object might well have been his son Robert Lutyens (1901-1972), who published a book with his co-author Harold Greenwood in 1948.

Near this drinking fountain, there is a stone embedded in the lawn. This stone, which is a little hard to find, bears an inscription that says that it marks the spot where once stood the ‘Receiving House of the Royal Humane Society’. It had been erected on land granted by The Crown in 1774 and was severely damaged by a bomb during WW2. Its story and that of other receiving houses is related in an article I found on the Internet:
“In 1774 two London doctors, William Hawes and Thomas Cogan, formed the ‘Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned’ which later grew into The Royal Humane Society. The society was founded based on the doctors’ fears that people could be mistakenly taken for dead and thereby accidentally buried alive. To combat this, a number of Receiving Houses were built along waterways in Westminster in the early nineteenth century. The Receiving Houses were designed as places where people could be taken into if they had gotten into difficulty in the water. A Receiving House was built in 1794 on the edge of the Serpentine…”

Judging by what is marked on a detailed map surveyed in 1914, the receiving house covered a considerably larger area than its close neighbour, the still extant Serpentine Lodge.

The Serpentine Bar and Kitchen is at the eastern end of the Serpentine. Walking around the back of it, you will notice a small monument in the form of a stone urn that marks the spot from which a supply of water to the Abbey of Westminster was granted by King Edward the Confessor (reigned 1042-1066). Further along the path, heading south, we cross a balustraded bridge with arches, facing the Serpentine. Water from the lake flows under the path and emerges from beneath it just before it falls over a cascade (made in 1820) into the luxuriantly vegetated ‘Dingley Dell’. East of the Dell and a short distance from the Serpentine, hidden in a small grove, there is a simple carved stone memorial to victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Unveiled in 1983, it was the first public Holocaust memorial in Great Britain.

South of the bridge and close to the Serpentine, there is an ornamental urn, the Queen Caroline Memorial, beneath which there is the following inscription:

“To the memory of Queen Caroline wife of George II for whom the Long Water and the Serpentine were created between 1727. 1731.”

Queen Caroline of Ansbach lived from 1683 to 1737.

The path around the Serpentine begins heading west along the south shore of the lake. It is flanked by many trees including graceful weeping willows.
Eventually, we reach the Lido, which includes a café and an outdoor bathing area, where bold swimmers, who are not averse to pondweed and sharing the water with waterfowl, can swim in the unheated water of the Serpentine. The front of the café is supported by a row of pillars with Doric capitals. A plaque attached to the wall facing the water commemorates a former leader of the Labour Party, George Lansbury (1859-1940), who created the bathing area in about 1930. When the situation is normal, when there is no covid19 pandemic, swimmers can use the bathing area throughout the year whatever the temperature of the water.

After enjoying a refreshment at the Lido, we move towards Rennie’s mighty bridge, passing first the Diana Memorial Fountain, opened by the Princess’s mother-in-law, Queen Elizabeth II, in 2004. This curiously designed water feature consists of two streams of water that flow down curved slopes and meet each other at the lower end of the fountain closest to the Serpentine. Near this, there is a huge, rather unattractive, sculpture of a bird with a long beak. Titled “Isis”, this artwork was created by Simon Gudgeon in 2009. Its circular base has bands of metal inscribed with the names of supporters of the Look Out Hyde Park appeal.

A short stretch of foot path leads from Isis to Rennie’s beautiful bridge across the Serpentine. After emerging from the tunnel under the bridge, we find ourselves back in Kensington Gardens and alongside the Long Water section of the Serpentine, walking in a north-westerly direction. Looking away from the water, you will spot a single storey building with three arches each topped with triangular pediments. Built in 1734-35, this is Queen Caroline’s Temple, which might have been designed by William Kent (1685-1748). Opposite it and across the water you get a fine view of Henry Moore’s sculptural arch.

Further on, the pathway runs alongside the water, affording a good view of the distant Italian Gardens and many waterfowl perched on a series of wooden posts crossing the water. Looking away from the water, you will see a statue of Peter Pan standing above a collection of children and animals. Peter Pan is a character created by the author James Barrie (1860-1937), who lived on Bayswater. The statue was created in 1912 by the artist George Frampton (1860-1928).
A few yards further, and we come alongside the western edge of the Italian Gardens. Looking west, you can see a distant obelisk, a memorial to the explorer John Hanning Speke (1827-1864). Near the northwest corner of the Gardens, there is a cute sculpture of two bears embracing each other. This metal artwork is placed upon a disused stone drinking fountain. A plaque notes that it commemorates the 80th anniversary of The Metropolitan Drinking Fountain & Cattle Trough Association, which was founded in 1859. If you get thirsty reading this plaque, then help is close at hand at the lovely Italian Gardens Café.

Now, here is a note about Queen Caroline, for whom the Serpentine was created, and which now provides much joy to many Londoners and others. When she inquired of Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745) the cost of enclosing the publicly owned St James Park to secure it for her exclusive use, he replied:
“Only three crowns”
By this, Walpole, the Prime Minister, meant the Crowns of England, Scotland, and Ireland because what she was asking was politically impossible.

Close to the western side of Kensington Palace, there is another body of water, the so-called Round Pond. This large ornamental water feature, which is popular both with waterfowl and human visitors, is not actually round. It is rectangular with rounded corners. It was created by King George II in 1730. On Sunday mornings, a group of mostly elderly men sail radio-controlled model yachts on the pond. These gentlemen belong to a model boating club founded in 1884 and another founded in 1876.

Although west London has several fine public art collections including The Victoria & Albert Museum and Leighton House, there is a place where you might not expect to find such a thing: Kensington Gardens. It is a veritable sculpture park.
ART IN THE PARK

Kensington Gardens offers almost as much to lovers of art as to those seeking nature and fresh air. The Gardens contain several sculptures of note. There is a carved stone portrait of Queen Victoria, seated on a throne just east of Kensington Palace. This was created by her fourth daughter, Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll (1848-1939) and erected in 1893. Immediately east of this, there is an equestrian statue, “Physical Energy”, sculpted in metal by George Frederic Watts (1817-1904). It was placed in the Gardens in 1907 and was the second large cast made from the artist’s original creation. If you extend a line drawn from the Queen Victoria sculpture to the “Physical Energy” artwork, eastwards across the Serpentine, it will reach a third sculpture, newer than the others. It is “The Arch” by Henry Moore (1898-1986). Made in travertine, this irregularly shaped arch is based on the shape of an animal bone, which can be seen at Henry Moore’s studio near Much Hadham in Hertfordshire.

The three sculptures already mentioned might be considered by some as ‘serious’ art. This might not be the case for the statue of Peter Pan, sculpted by Sir George Frampton (1860-1928), a serious artist, and commissioned by JM Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan. It was placed in Kensington Gardens in 1912.

Even more whimsical than the Peter Pan sculpture is the lovely “Elfin Tree” that stands close to the Princess Diana Playground. It is enclosed in what looks like an old-fashioned zoo animal cage. This cage contains a dead tree, the stump of an (apparently) 900-year-old oak tree, but that is not all. The folds, nooks, and crannies of the tree are filled with tiny carved figures. These painted figures depict insects, birds, animals, and people. They were carved, mostly from the tree’s own wood, from 1911 onwards by the illustrator Ivor Innes. Amongst the millions of people who love this charming tree, was the comedian Spike Milligan (1918-2002). In 1996, he led a successful campaign to have the tree and its inhabitants restored. Since then, the artist and restorer Marcus Richards, who carried out the restoration, has been maintaining it in a good state.
Kensington Gardens is a good place to follow trends in contemporary and modern art because it is home to the two branches of The Serpentine Galleries. The older branch of this establishment is housed in a former tea pavilion that was designed by James Grey West (1885-1951) and built in 1933-34 in a style that reminds me of that of Edwin Lutyens. It was first used as an art gallery in 1970. Most of the exhibitions held in this place are visually thrilling and superbly curated. Many of the shows display works that are often at the ‘cutting edge’ of the creative world.

In 2013, a new branch of The Serpentine Galleries opened in a former gunpowder store built in 1805. Attached to this venerable edifice, The Magazine, is an exciting contemporary creation, a café designed by Zaha Hadid (1950-2016) and her colleagues. Like its older sibling, The Magazine provides a superb exhibition space for often adventurous artworks. Entry to both branches of The Serpentine is free of charge, So, even if contemporary art is not your cup of tea, it will cost you nothing to catch a glimpse of, or to immerse yourself in, what has been happening in the art world recently.

Every year since 2000, excepting 2020, the Serpentine Galleries have commissioned a temporary pavilion to be constructed next to it. A website explains:

“The pavilions, which last for three months and should be realized with a limited budget, are located in the heart of the Kensington Gardens and are intended to provide a multi-purpose social space where people gather and interact with contemporary art, music, dance and film events.”

The architects chosen to design these temporary structures have not had any of their buildings erected in London prior to their pavilions. Some of the architects involved over the years included Zaha Hadid, Smiljan Radić, Sou Fujimoto, Herzog & de Meuron and Ai Weiwei, Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, Frank Gehry, Olafur Eliasson & Kjetil Thorsen, Álvaro Siza, and Eduardo Souto de Moura with Cecil Balmond, and Oscar Niemeyer. With a very few exceptions, I have liked the pavilions and admired their often visually intriguing, original designs. My favourites include the 2007 pavilion by Olafur Eliasson & Kjetil Thorsen; 2009 by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa; 2013 by Sou Fujimoto; and 2016 by Bjarke Ingels. The pavilion designed by Smiljan Radić now stands in the Oudolf Garden at Hauser and Worth near Bruton in Somerset. As for the other previous pavilions, I do not know of their fate.
In 2021, the pavilion was designed by an architectural practice, Counterspace, based in Johannesburg (South Africa) and led by Sumayya Vally, who is the youngest architect to have become involved in the Serpentine pavilion project.

According to the Serpentine’s website the 2021 pavilion is: “… based on past and present places of meeting, organising and belonging across several London neighbourhoods significant to diasporic and cross-cultural communities, including Brixton, Hoxton, Tower Hamlets, Edgware Road, Barking and Dagenham and Peckham, among others. Responding to the historical erasure and scarcity of informal community spaces across the city, the Pavilion references and pays homage to existing and erased places that have held communities over time and continue to do so today.”

Well, maybe this was the designers’ aim, but the pavilion did not convey any of that concept to me. This circular, building coloured black and white, immediately conjured up in my mind images of often disused municipal structures such as bandstands, park shelters, and public conveniences that might have been constructed on provincial British or even South African seafronts in the 1930s to 1950s. It might have been conceived with high-minded ideas in the architects’ heads, but I felt that the structure was lacking in visual interest both in detail and in its entirety. Compared with many of the previous pavilions erected on its site, this is one of the dullest I have seen. It is a shame that the pavilion’s creators had not put more effort into its appearance than into the message(s) it is supposed to convey. To my taste, it is a disappointment because I have greatly enjoyed so many of its predecessors, but do not let me put you off: go and see it for yourself.

A complete contrast to what is on offer at the Serpentine Galleries and their annual summer pavilion is offered by the Albert Memorial at the south side of Kensington Gardens, facing the Royal Albert Hall. Commissioned by Queen Victoria to commemorate her late husband Prince Albert (1819-1861), it was completed in 1872, when his widow unveiled it.

This Victorian gothic artwork was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878). A gilt-bronze sculpture of Albert seated on a throne is covered by an ornate canopy. This likeness of the prince, now covered with gold leaf, was created by John Henry Foley (1818-1874).
It was Foley who also created the sculptural group depicting Asia, which occupies one of the four corners of the memorial beneath the prince. The three other corners are occupied by impressive sculptural ensembles representing Africa, sculpted by William Theed (1804-1891); America by John Bell (1811-1895); and Europe by Patrick MacDowell (1799-1870). In addition to these groups of sculpture depicting four continents and evoking the glory of the British Empire (even if they might be considered ‘non-politically correct’ today), there are sculptural friezes, and sculptures depicting: Agriculture (William Calder Marshall; 1813-1894), Engineering (John Lawlor; c1820-1901), Manufacturing (Henry Weekes; 1807-1877) and Commerce (Thomas Thorneycroft; 1815-1885). In brief, the Albert Memorial provides a compact showcase of Victorian British sculptors’ skills.

Along with the sculptures, the Serpentine Galleries, help to make Kensington Gardens unique amongst London’s open spaces. Unlike the others, Kensington Gardens is rich in artworks, both permanent and temporary.

Now, we will leave Kensington to view a few examples of country houses further west of it, deeper into what was formerly countryside. All of them used to be situated in rural settings, but now they and what remains of their grounds are surrounded by suburbia. Hampton Court Palace must be one of the best known of the grand country residences to the west of London and consequently has been described well by numerous other writers. It is well worth visiting but I will leave describing it to others. Bushy Park, which is contiguous with the grounds of Hampton Court, offers much beauty and variety to visitors both local and from further afield. Let me introduce it to you.
Like an oriental pasha with his harem, a large stag with huge branching antlers sat in the shade of a big tree on a warm September afternoon in Bushy Park. Five female deer sat close by. All of them were looking at him attentively.

Bushy Park abuts the grounds of Hampton Court Palace, which was built in 1515 for Henry VIII’s former favourite, Cardinal Wolsely, who died in disgrace in 1530 after losing the king’s favour. The area where the Park stands has known human usage since the Bronze Age, maybe as long ago as 4000 years. In mediaeval times, the area was used for agricultural activities.

In 1529, when Henry VIII took over Hampton Court from Cardinal Wolsely, Bushy Park became used for deer hunting. Later, in the 17th century, King Charles I (reigned 1625-1649) ordered the building of a canal, the Longford River, which carries water for 12 miles from the River Colne (a tributary of the Thames) to the grounds of Hampton Court Palace.

The man-made waterway, designed by Nicholas Lane (1585-1644) and dug by hand in only 9 months in 1638-39, flows through Bushy Park, supplying water to its numerous water features. The water was drawn from the river Colne at a point (Longford near Slough) whose altitude (72 feet above sea level) was great enough to ensure a fast flow to Hampton Court Palace, which is only about 13 feet above sea level. Today, the water still flows rapidly through the Park’s complex network of streams and ponds. Later, the architect of the current St Pauls Cathedral, Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723), designed the mile-long avenue (Chestnut Avenue), which runs through the park, and its water feature, as a grand approach to Hampton Court Palace.
During the two World Wars, large parts of Bushy Park were used temporarily to grow much-needed food for the British public. Before it became a royal hunting ground, much of the park was common land, accessible to all and sundry. The general public had to wait to have access to this lovely area until the reign of William IV (reigned 1830-1837), who requested that there should be free admission of the public to ‘his’ park. In 1838, when Queen Victoria opened the grounds of Hampton Court to the people, visits to Bushy Park increased. The park’s popularity grew significantly when the railway reached Hampton Court from London in 1849. Today, judging by how difficult it can be to find a space in the car park, Bushy Park’s popularity continues to be great.

We entered the park along the Chestnut Avenue. With its tidily arranged rows of trees, it reminded me of an entrance driveway to a French chateau or one of the opening scenes in the film “Last Year in Marienbad”. The trees are protected from the park’s deer by fences that surround the bases of their trunks. We drove off the avenue into the car park near the Pheasantry, a café housed in a pleasing contemporarily designed building (built 2014, designed by Mizzi architects, who have been responsible for many attractive kiosks in Kensington Gardens, Hyde Park, and other Royal Parks). It also offers pleasant outdoor tables and chairs.

After drinking coffee, we took a walk in the park. There are patches of woodland fenced off from the rest of the park, doubtless to prevent deer from entering. The Woodland Gardens contains many trees and bushes. The shady area is dotted with ponds, some of them almost covered with waterlilies, and fast flowing, shallow streams. Small bridges cross the streams in this delightful part of the park and many ducks swim in the water.

We left the woodland area to enter the rest of the park. This consists of wide expanses of grassy terrain with isolated clumps of trees. These areas allow the visitor to enjoy wide vistas and huge expanses of sky. It does not take long before you spot deer grazing, some of them quite close to visitors enjoying the park. What at first sight looks like a distant leafless tree branch will suddenly begin moving, proving that what you had spotted was not a tree but the antlers of a stag. Seeing the deer running wild is a joy that adds to the loveliness of the park. We also watched horse riders and cyclists, but these are not as visually engaging as the deer.
After taking a somewhat circuitous but very picturesque route through the park, we arrived at a circular pond, which is near the Hampton Court end of Wren’s Chestnut Avenue. Part of the original design, the avenue skirts the circumference of the pond. As we approached the pond, a solitary heron sitting on its edge, noticed us and then flew elegantly across the pond, less than 3 feet above the water’s surface. The middle of the pond is occupied by a fountain surmounted by a gold-coloured statue. The stone plinth on which the statue stands has several more metal statues, which are not gilded. These are most probably, but not definitely, works of the Italian Francesco Fanelli (c1590-1653). The tall masonry plinth was designed by, amongst others, Nicholas Stone (c1586-1647).

The gilded figure on the top of the fountain depicts Diana, the Roman goddess associated with hunting. This seems like an appropriate statue to stand in what were royal hunting grounds until the 19th century. However, when the French sculptor Hubert Le Sueur (1580-1658) was commissioned by King Charles I to make this statue to adorn the garden of his wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, it stood at London’s Somerset House. There, it stood on a lower pedestal than it does today. Incidentally, Le Sueur’s bronze equestrian statue of King Charles I stands in Trafalgar Square close to the point from which all distances from London are measured. Both Hubert Le Sueur and Francesco Fanelli had had experience working in the Florentine studios established by the Flemish born sculptor Giambologna (1529-1608), who was famous for his bronze statuary.

The Diana statue and its associated artworks were moved to Hampton Court Palace by Oliver Cromwell during the English Commonwealth (1649-1660). The fountain topped by Diana was moved to its present position during the works carried out to the designs of Sir Christopher Wren. The current plinth was completed in 1713 during the reign of Queen Anne. So, it was not until the 18th century that the goddess of hunting stood amongst the hunters’ prey. Although it is commonly held that the gilded statue represents Diana, some believe that it might depict Arethusa, Proserpina, or Venus. The one person that she does not depict is the late Diana, Princess of Wales.

After the heron had taken flight, we noticed about four black-coloured birds perching on the sculptures on the fountain’s plinth. One of them was on top of Diana’s head. The birds had largeish bodies and long necks that were often sinuous. They were cormorants, but none of them had their wings unfolded, which is what these creatures do to dry them.
Deer grazing in Bushy Park

The extensive grounds of Bushy Park are supplied with water from a manmade waterway, the above-mentioned Longford River, which fascinated me. Here is a little more about this.
A group of agitated swans were on a stream beneath an iron bridge. A wire mesh, stretched from one bank of the waterway to the other, was the cause of their frustration because some of the birds were on one side of the barrier and the rest on the other, and they had not yet discovered a way to pass the obstruction. It was distressing to watch a swan on one side pecking at the mesh trying to reach the beak of another doing the same thing on its side. The purpose of the mesh was not clear to me.

The water beneath this bridge at the northwest corner of the Waterhouse Plantation in London’s Bushy Park flows along the man-made Longford River. It runs from the River Colne at Longford, which is on the western edge of Heathrow Airport, to the River Thames. After being diverted into several separate channels, its waters flow into the Thames at three points near Hampton Court and Bushy Park. On reaching the northern edge of Bushy Park it flows under the bridge where I saw the frustrated swans and then through woodland until it reaches a large triangular pool, the Waterhouse Pond. From there, its waters flow through outlets controlled by sluices into a maze of streams, which water the grounds of parts of Bushy Park.

The river and the Waterhouse Pond are elevated several feet above the surrounding terrain. This allows water to escape from the river via small channels and from the pond through the sluices, which have manually operated devices with taps to control the flow. Near the Waterhouse Pond there is a tall wooden totem pole, which was designed by Norman Tait and constructed in 1992. The pole was:

“Installed to mark the connection between Canada and Bushy Park, which housed a large Canadian camp during World War I.”
The Waterhouse Pond was a noisy place when we visited it early one spring morning. Most of the noise was being made by pairs of Canada Geese, which was rather appropriate given that they were in sight of the totem pole. The geese were craning their long necks forward and cackling loudly, their reddish tongues very visible. Nearby, occasional Egyptian Geese with their characteristic ‘eye make-up’ colouring, were furiously proclaiming something that seemed most important to them. Elsewhere in the vicinity, there was a veritable symphony of bird calls including plenty produced by green parakeets which were perched on camellia bushes, some of them pecking away at the flowers, dislodging petals one by one as they searched for something tasty. It was pleasant to be in a place that humans were completely outnumbered by birds … and squirrels.

The Longford River that supplies the lovely water features in Bushy Park did not exist prior to 1638. In that year, in accordance with the wishes of the ill-fated King Charles I, the river (really, a canal) was constructed to bring water to Hampton Court and its neighbour Bushy Park. Twelve miles in length, it took only nine months to complete. Before the twentieth century, when it acquired its present name, the waterway was known variously as: the ‘New River’, the ‘King's River’, the ‘Queen's River’, the ‘Cardinal's River’, the ‘Hampton Court Cut’, and the ‘Hampton Court Canal’. There is another New River in Greater London, which, like the Longford, is man-made. The other New River, which retains its original name, was built in 1613 to carry drinking water from the River Lea at Ware in Hertfordshire to reservoirs in Islington.

The part of the Longford River, which I have been describing, runs through, and irrigates, the Waterhouse Plantation. This and its neighbour, another plantation, the Woodland Garden, where swamp cypresses (a species of the genus Taxodium) with their curious aerial outcrops may be seen, were originally planted in the early 19th century. Both areas are surrounded by fences to prevent the ingress of deer that reside in Bushy Park. They were redeveloped extensively between 1948 and 1949, and now look well-established. Another branch of the river flows in the unfenced area of the park and feeds first The Boating Pool (triangular in shape and near a parking area close to the Diana Statue), then The Heron Pond, and then east of both of these, The Leg of Mutton Pond.
After having been introduced to it by friends, who live not far away from it in Richmond, we have visited Bushy Park several times and enjoyed its variety and wildlife every time. If you are planning a visit – something I recommend highly – try to reach it early, preferably well before 10am so that you will have no difficulty parking and because at that early hour the park is reasonably empty of other visitors, many of them are dogs, which are excluded from the plantations, with their owners; joggers in expensive gear; and ‘yummy mummies’ with infants in tow or in upmarket push chairs.

It was unfortunate that Charles the First lost his head, but fortunate for us that he created a waterway that makes Bushy Park so delightful today.

Now, we move away from Bushy to visit some other estates, which used to be surrounded by open countryside and are now embedded in suburbia. At Ealing, there is a house that was built neither for royalty nor the aristocracy. This dwelling, Pitzhanger Manor, was built by a member of the professions, an architect.
One of my favourite museums in London is The Sir John Soane Museum in Lincolns Inn Fields. It was the London home of the architect, Sir John Soane (1753-1837), which he remodelled extensively between 1794 and 1824. A great collector of antiquities and artworks of all kinds including a fine set of paintings by William Hogarth, the building has many ingenious features both to save space and to convey natural light to parts of the house far from its exterior.

Like many gentlemen in his social class, Soane owned a country home. He designed his own, Pitzhanger Manor (‘Pitts hanger’ on old maps), in the village of Ealing, which was a long way outside the metropolis. There had been a manor house on the spot since at least the 17th century, but the building that Soane bought in 1800 was not the original edifice. He bought the then existing manor house, which had been designed in 1768 by the architect George Dance, the Younger (1741-1825), with whom he had been apprenticed. Soane built his home between 1800 and 1804 in what is now Walpole Park but was then part of the Manor of Pitzhanger. According to the Pitzhanger Manor website:
“In 1800, when the house came on the market, Soane bought it for £4,500, removing much of the original building but leaving one wing – the extension on which he had worked as a young man.”

The building Soane created at Pitzhanger, like his home at Lincolns Inn Fields, was filled with features to show off his undoubtedly fine talents. He built his home in Ealing for use as his country abode. It is said that he often walked between it and Lincolns Inn Fields, almost nine miles. Soane had intended to move his collection of art and books to Ealing, but they remained at Lincolns Inn Fields. For, his wife Eliza did not like country life and Soane had fallen out with his sons. So, in 1810, he sold Pitzhanger. Later, it became home to the daughters of a former Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval (1762-1812), who had been assassinated.

Ealing Urban District Council bought the property in 1901 and converted it for use as a public library after its last occupant, Frederika Perceval (1805-1900) had died. Between 1987 and 2012, Soane’s building and what little remained of Wyatt’s, was used as the principal museum of The London Borough of Ealing. By this time, a gallery for exhibitions had been added to the house. Then, the house and gallery closed in 2012 for extensive restoration works, which were only completed in 2019, which is when we first visited the place.
Much of what Soane designed has been beautifully restored to what it must have looked like when he owned the property. Although most of the rooms in the house have adequate lighting via windows, Soane made good use of mirrors to help light reach places deep within his building, just as he did, to great effect, at his house in Lincolns Inn Fields.

There is an entry fee for Pitzhanger Manor, which is worth paying especially if there is an interesting exhibition on view in the adjoining gallery. When we visited, there was a superb show of works, mainly sculptural mirrors that might well have intrigued Soane, by the sculptor Anish Kapoor (born 1954). However, compared with Soane’s house in Lincolns Inn Fields, which is crammed full of artefacts of great interest, Pitzhanger, although beautiful, feels a bit sterile in comparison.

Another former country house of interest is only about 1.6 miles southwest of Pitzhanger Manor. Currently (2021), Boston Manor house is under repair and not yet open to the public.
The name ‘Boston’ is often associated with a revolutionary tea party in a former British possession across the Atlantic Ocean. Some might also associate it with a town in Lincolnshire. And Londoners might connect it with a ‘tube’ station on the Piccadilly Line of the London Underground. The station, designed in the modernist art-deco style by Stanley Heaps (1880-1962) with Charles Holden, is a stop on the line to Heathrow Airport: Boston Manor. I first visited it in April 2021.

In the case of Boston Manor, the name Boston is derived from an older name ‘Bordeston’, which comes from the word ‘borde’, meaning ‘boundary’. Another etymology of the name, which is unrelated to that of the Boston in Lincolnshire, is that it derives from the name of a Saxon farmer named ‘Bord’. Whatever the origin of the name, Boston Manor, the house, and its lovely gardens (now known as Boston Manor Park), which reach the bank of the River Brent, stands on the border between Hanwell and Brentford.

Until the Priory of St Helens in Bishopsgate (in the City of London) was suppressed in 1538, the Manor of Bordeston was owned by it. King Edward VI granted it to Edward, Duke of Somerset (1500-1552), Lord Protector of England during the earlier part of his reign, and later, it reverted to the Crown. In 1552, Queen Elizabeth I gave the manor to the Earl of Leicester, who immediately sold it to the merchant and financier Sir Thomas Gresham (c1519-1579). After several changes of ownership, the property was sold in 1670 to the City merchant James Clitherow. The new owner demolished the existing manor house. He modified and enlarged Boston House, originally built in the Jacobean style by Lady Mary Reade in 1622, widow of Gresham’s stepson, Sir William Reade.

This house with three gables still stands but was closed during April 2021 because it was undergoing extensive repairs. It looks out onto grounds planted with fine trees, many of them cedars of Lebanon. The grounds, which include a small lake, slope down gently towards the River Brent.
The house and grounds, Boston Manor Park, remained in the possession of the Clitherow family until 1923, when Colonel John Bourchier Stracey-Clitherow (1853-1931) sold the house and what was left of the estate (after some of it had been sold to property developers) to the then local authority, Brentford Urban District Council. During his military career, this gentleman was taken prisoner during the ill-fated Jameson Raid in South Africa, a prelude to the Second Anglo-Boer War.

Before the Clitherows began selling off their land at Boston Manor, there was a house in the grounds called ‘Little Boston’. It stood until the early 1920s when it was sold to a developer named Jackman, who demolished it to build houses now standing on Windmill Road. John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), who became the sixth president of the USA in 1825, resided in Little Boston house between 1815 and 1817 whilst he was American minister to Britain during that period. Adams was born in Massachusetts. So, it seems fitting that he lived in a house and an estate both bearing the name of an important city in that American state.

On our way to see our friend, who introduced us to Boston Manor House and Park, we drove along a road named in memory of the Clitherow family. Sadly, what with the building works and covid19 restrictions, we were unable to view the reputedly fine interior of Boston Manor House. However, the garden and its lake, where we spotted its resident tortoise (or terrapin) sunning itself on a log, proved to be a lovely surprise, well worth visiting … and you need not cross the Atlantic to get to this Boston from London.

*Boston Manor House lies just under 1 ½ miles west of another former country seat, Gunnersbury Park, where there is much more to view than at Boston Manor. Its lovely peaceful park makes it a surprisingly pleasant contrast to the busy section of the North Circular Road, which runs close to its southern boundary wall.*
A SURPRISING PARK AND APPEASEMENT

One day, when driving slowly along the congested North Circular Road near to its intersection with the M4 motorway, I noticed a long old wall above which I could see what looked like the pinnacles of a Gothic revival folly. We were driving past Gunnersbury Park in West London and did not have time to stop. So, the next day, we drove back to the park and spent some time walking around it. What we found was a fascinating estate consisting of beautiful park land and a series of architectural delights. Had I not noticed what I did when stuck in a traffic jam on the North Circular Road, I am not sure that we would not have considered making a trip to find out what lies behind the wall next that surrounds Gunnersbury Park.

The first impression one gets on entering Gunnersbury Park, with its wealth of trees including many Cedars of Lebanon, is that you are inside the grounds of a great house such as you can find at, for example, Chiswick House and Osterley Park. That impression is justified because Gunnersbury Park is basically what is left of the grounds of a mansion built in the Palladian style for the lawyer and politician Sir John Maynard (1604-1690) between 1658 and 1663. It was designed by the architect John Webb (1611-1672). Maynard died at Gunnersbury Park.

Between 1762 and 1786, Gunnersbury Park was used as a summer residence by Princess Amelia (1711-1786), who was King George III’s aunt. In 1761, she had bought the estate from George Furness (c1688-1756). Furness, whose father had been a ‘factor’ in the East India Company, was a British merchant and politician as well as an art collector. He was a Member of Parliament between 1720 and 1756 and had bought the property in 1739 from John Hobart (1693-1756), 1st Earl of Buckinghamshire, a British politician. Furness improved the grounds by employing the famous gardener William Kent (1685-1748). Some of the latter’s original design has survived the passage of time.
Princess Amelia, the second daughter of King George II, did much to improve the grounds, by landscaping; arranging planting; and by adding ornamental buildings, which still add to the charm of the place. These buildings included the so-called ‘bath house’ and a neo-classical temple, which overlooks a circular pond. The princess held fabulous parties at Gunnersbury. In “Handbook to The Environs of London” by James Thorne, published in 1876, the politician and intellectual Horace Walpole (1717-1797), author of the Gothick novel “The Castle of Otranto”, who attended some of these parties, is quoted thus:

“Ever since the late king’s death, I have made Princess Amelia’s parties once or twice a week … I was sent for again to dine at Gunnersbury on Friday, and forced to send to town for a dress-coat and a sword. There were the Prince of Wales, the Prince of Mecklenburg, the Duke of Portland, Lord Clanbrassil … The Princess, Lady Barrymore, and the rest of us, played three pools at Commerce till ten … While we were at the Dairy, the Princess insisted on my making some verses on Gunnersbury. I pleaded being superannuated. She would not excuse me. I promised she should have an Ode on her next birthday, which diverted the Prince; but all would not do.”

The next morning, Walpole composed three verses for the Princess. One of them (quoted in a letter from Walpole to HS Conway dated 18th of June 1786) reads as follows:

“Oh! Why is Flaccus not alive,
Your favourite scene to sing?
To Gunnersbury’s charms could give
His lyre immortal spring.”

Walpole admitted in his letter to Conway that his poem was not one of his best. He wrote:

“If they are but poor verses, consider I am sixty-nine, and was half asleep, and made them ex-tempore – and by command!”

Following the death of the Princess, the Palladian mansion was demolished in 1801. Its contents were sold by auction and the 205 acres of its grounds were divided into lots and sold at the same time. Most of the land was bought by Alexander Copland (1774-1834), who built a new house, which forms the basis for the present building, which now houses a museum. Copland was a builder, and business partner of the architect Henry Holland (1745-1806). He was a son of Alexander Copland and his wife Barbara (née Smirke). The younger Alexander, who bought Gunnersbury, was a cousin of the architect Robert Smirke (1780-1867), whose brother, also an architect, Sydney Smirke (1797-1877) designed the Orangery, which was built at Gunnersbury Park in 1836 and has been restored beautifully.
Copland built The Large Mansion (now the museum). Either Stephen Cosser or Major Alexander Morrison, a retired East India Company officer who bought the plot from him, built the so-called ‘Small Mansion’ (to the east of the Large Mansion), which is currently in a poor state of repair. A gardener explained to us that it was supposed to be cared for by one London borough whereas the Large Mansion was under the care of another. In 1828, the part of the estate with the Small Mansion was bought by Thomas Farmer, who lived there as Copland’s neighbour until 1835.

In 1835, Copland’s Large Mansion was bought by the banker Nathan Mayer Rothschild (1777-1836). After his death, a year later, his widow Hannah (née Barent-Cohen; 1783-1850) used Gunnersbury Park as her second home and employed the architect Sidney Smirke to make alterations to it. Following Hannah’s death, her oldest son Lionel Rothschild (1808-1879), the first ever practising Jew to become a Member of Parliament, took over the property and enlarged its park as well as improving the house’s facilities. After his death and that of his widow Charlotte, the estate moved into the possession of their youngest son Leopold de Rothschild (1845-1917).

In 1889, Leopold purchased the Small Mansion and thereby reunited the two parts of the original Gunnersbury estate. Under the ownership of the Rothschild family, many improvements were made to the grounds, some of which I will mention soon. After Leopold died in 1917, the estate was broken up and parts were sold off.

In 1925, both mansions and about 185 acres of attached grounds were purchased for public use by the then Boroughs of Acton and Ealing. Now, the park and its mansions are maintained by the boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow.
The Large Mansion is elegant but not as attractive as the one which was demolished long ago (it can be seen in old drawings). Nearby, the temple that overlooks a circular pond, popular with waterfowl, is delightful and reminded me of some of the garden architecture at Stourhead (in Wiltshire). Wandering around the garden, you will come across the Gothic revival architectural features I saw when driving past Gunnersbury Park on the North Circular Road. These are built around ‘Princess Amelia’s Bath House’, a garden folly built in the 1780s. Not far from this, there are very picturesque ‘Gothick’ ruins near to the estate’s farm buildings. These might be the remains of the dairy mentioned above in the quote from Horace Walpole or possibly later additions to the grounds constructed by an owner who bought the Princess’s estate. One source suggests that what is now called the ‘Bath House’ might have been the dairy in Amelia’s time at Gunnersbury. Whatever its history, lovers of romantic Gothic revival and ‘Gothick’ novels ruins will get great pleasure from what can be seen at Gunnersbury Park.

The Orangery stands next to a large pond. This structure was built whilst the Rothschilds owned the estate. It was constructed in 1836, designed by Sidney Smirke. The family were responsible for another water feature on their estate. It has a name that intrigued us: the Potomac Pond. This almost circular water body is surrounded by a fence and almost hidden by the trees and other vegetation growing around its perimeter. It is only accessible to members of a local angling club. The Rothschilds had purchased a former clay pit and converted it into the pond. One of the claypit’s kilns was rebuilt to create a Gothic revival tower on its shore. This lovely folly, which would look at home in a painting by the German Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), might have once been used as a boathouse.

I have described a few of the features that make it well worthwhile to visit Gunnersbury Park. The place is so near to London and the M4 motorway, yet it feels so far away. If it were not the background roar of the traffic and the low flying aeroplanes descending towards Heathrow Airport, fewer than usual these days during the covid19 pandemic, it would be hard to believe you were not deep in the countryside.
Gunnersbury Park was, as mentioned, opened to the public after 1925. Its inauguration as a public space was officiated by a politician, who is now no longer held in high esteem. Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940) has earned a poor reputation, mainly because of his unfortunate policy of appeasement with Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, which included the Munich Agreement in September 1938 that allowed the Nazis to invade the Sudetenland, the western part of Czechoslovakia. It was only the disastrous German invasion of Poland that made the then Prime Minister, Chamberlain, take the decision for Britain to declare war on Germany.

The Large Mansion, has a terrace running next to its long rear façade. At each end of the terrace, there are two neo-classical archways. In one of these arches, there are two commemorative tablets inscribed in upper-case lettering. Both note the fact that Gunnersbury Park was opened for use by the public by “The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P., Minister of Health”. The rest of the information on the tablets relates to the financing of the purchase of the park (from Lionel Nathan de Rothschild).

One of the tablets commemorates that a quarter of the cost of the park, purchased by the Boroughs of both Acton and Ealing, was provided by Middlesex County Council. The other tablet recalls that in 1927, The Urban District Council of Brentford and Chiswick joined those of Acton and Ealing in the ownership and running of the public park. Thus, for a while, the park was managed by three different district councils. In 1965, Brentford and Chiswick became absorbed into the new Borough of Hounslow. That year, the Borough of Acton became part of the new enlarged Borough of Ealing. So, now the park is managed by two boroughs instead of three.

In 1926, when he opened the park at an occasion that has been recorded on film, Neville Chamberlain was Member of Parliament for Birmingham Ladywood, representing the Unionist party, now part of the Conservative and Unionist party. Two years before he opened Gunnersbury Park, he was appointed Minister of Health by the then Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. Although he might have had good reasons for doing so, allowing the Germans to walk into Czechoslovakia and overrun the Sudetenland seems unforgivable. However, and this by no means makes his policy of Appeasement more palatable, his opening the gates of Gunnersbury Park to allow the public to walk in has provided joy to visitors from near and far for many decades.
Whereas Boston Manor and Gunnersbury Park are both shadows of their former selves, the same cannot be said of two other west London ‘country estates’: Osterley and Chiswick. Both are well maintained, open to the public, and their grounds provide ample space for keen walkers and lovers of landscaped gardens.
When I was born, my parents wanted to call me ‘Adam’. That was in the early 1950s. However, Mom and Dad were worried that Adam was a relatively unusual first name in those far-off days and that with such a name I might have been teased at school. As it happened, I only attended schools where the pupils were addressed by their surnames and mine, Yamey, was subject of a lot of mirth amongst my schoolmates. In view of their concerns, I was named ‘Robert Adam’ but have always been called ‘Adam’. My father, an economist, was all for calling me ‘Adam Smith Yamey’ in memory of the ‘father of economics’ Adam Smith (1723-1790), but my mother was not keen on this name for me. The choice of Robert was possibly influenced by the fact that one of my mother’s brothers bore this name. It is also very vaguely possible that the name ‘Robert Adam’ was chosen in memory of another man who was alive during Adam Smith’s lifetime, the architect Robert Adam (1728-1792). Our family home was not far from one of his magnificent creations, Kenwood House near Highgate in north London, which we used to visit occasionally. Maybe because I share his name, I have grown to like and appreciate the architecture and interior decors created by the 18th century Robert Adam. However, you do not need to be called ‘Robert Adam’ to enjoy Adam’s great works. One of these is Osterley Park in west London.

According to James Thorne (writing in 1876), the manor of ‘Osterlee’ belonged to John de Osterlee in the reign of Edward I (lived 1239-1307). Through the years it moved through the hands of men such as John Somerseth (died 1454), Henry Marquis of Exeter (1498-1538), Edward Seymour (Protector Somerset 1500-1552), Augustin Thaier, and then Sir Thomas Gresham (1519-1579), who had also owned Boston Manor.

Gresham was, according to Thorne, “… the prince of merchants”. An able financier, he worked on behalf of King Edward VI, Queen Mary I, and Queen Elizabeth I, and was also the founder of the Royal Exchange in London. In 1857, the economist Henry Dunning Macleod, used Thomas’s surname to name a law of economics, namely ‘bad money drives out good’ (Gresham’s Law). By 1577, Gresham had enclosed Osterley Park and constructed a wonderful mansion. Although there are no surviving images of this building, its architectural style can be imagined by looking at the Tudor stable block (c1560) that stands next to the present Osterley House.
After Gresham’s death, the building began to decline even while his widow, Anne (née Ferneley), continued to dwell in it. After her death in 1596 at the age of 75, Osterley House and its grounds were owned by a series of people until about 1713, when the banker Sir Francis Child (1642-1713) bought the property. He left the place to his sons Robert (1674-1721), Francis (1684-1740), and Samuel (1693-1752). It was the latter’s son, the third Francis Child (1735-1763), who engaged the fashionable architect Robert Adam to make improvements to Osterley House. He was employed in the 1760s to modernise Gresham’s edifice. The most obvious of Adam’s works can be seen before you enter the house. It is the neo-classical portico supported by two rows of six Ionic columns that evokes memories of the Propylaeum of the Parthenon in Athens, which Adam might well have known about after his Grand Tour of Europe undertaken between 1755 and 1757, which, incidentally, included a visit to the ruins at Split (now in Croatia). The portico joins two wings of the building that Child inherited.

In addition to the magnificent portico that contrasts with the Tudor brickwork of the rest of the building, Adam redesigned the entire interior of the building, creating a series of beautifully decorated rooms, most of which have eye-catching ornate ceilings. One room, which does not have a decorated ceiling is the Long Gallery which was used to house some of the large collection of paintings that used to hang in the Child’s London home in Berkeley Square, which they sold in 1767 (it has been replaced by a newer structure). Most of these artworks were removed from Osterley House when Lord Jersey gifted it to the National Trust in 1949, and then they were lost in a fire. They have been replaced by other fine paintings. Many of the chairs and sofas and other furnishings in the Long Gallery (and other rooms) were designed by Robert Adam, who took great interest in every detail of what he created. The absence of ceiling decorations in the Long Gallery, it was explained to us, was intentional. The ceiling was left unadorned so that viewers of the paintings were not distracted by decorative features above them. In the other rooms, the ceilings rival other decorative aspects for the viewer’s attention. From the grand entrance hall onwards, the visitor is faced with a series of rooms that compete for his or her admiration. Amongst these marvels of interior decoration, I was particularly impressed by the Drawing Room that drew inspiration from the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra (destroyed by the terrorist group IS in 2009), the Tapestry Room, and the delicately decorated Etruscan Dressing Room. I have singled out these rooms, but the others are also magnificent. Adam’s creations make a visit to Osterley Park a breath-takingly exciting visual experience.
As the crow flies, Kenwood House is ten miles northeast of Osterley House, or about 15 miles by road. Osterley House was completely remodelled by Robert Adam. Beneath his modifications, its structure is basically the Tudor mansion that the Child family purchased. The situation is different at Kenwood, where the architect enlarged the existing structure.

Those enamoured by the works of Robert Adam should visit both Osterley and Kenwood, which are open to the public.

There is another place in London, Home House in Portman Square, once the home of the art historian and Soviet agent Sir Anthony Blunt (1907-1983) and the Courtauld Institute. It is now a private members’ club (Home House Club), whose Adam interiors, which I have seen, are also spectacular examples of his creative powers. If you are not fortunate enough to know a member of this club, you will have to satisfy yourself by visiting Kenwood and Osterley Houses, but you will not be disappointed.

When visiting Osterley, whose interiors will not disappoint you, a stroll around its formal gardens is also worthwhile. Like so many other 18th century landscaped gardens attached to stately homes, that at Osterley contains several buildings, which were placed to add to the picturesqueness of the grounds.

The Doric Temple of Pan with four columns and four pilasters was built in the 18th century, and probably designed by the Scottish-Swedish architect William Chambers (1723-1796), who was born in the Swedish city of Gothenburg. Between 1740 and 1749, while in the employ of the Swedish East India Company, he made three voyages to China, where he learnt Chinese. A major rival of Robert Adam, he was an exponent of neoclassicism, of which the small Temple of Pan is a fine example. The interior of the temple, which we were unable to see because of covid19 prevention measures, contains, according to Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry:

“… mid c18 interior plasterwork with Rococo flourishes and medallions of Colen Campbell and Sir Isaac Newton.”

The front of the temple faces across a lawn towards another structure, 175 yards away. It is The Garden House designed by Chambers’ rival, Robert Adam.
Adam designed the Garden House in about 1780. It has a semi-circular façade with five large windows within frames topped with semi-circular arches. Pevsner and Cherry describe these windows as “five linked Venetian windows”. A balustrade tops the façade and almost hides the building’s conical roof. Between the windows, there are roundels containing bas-relief depictions of classical scenes with bucolic themes. The building was part of Mrs Child’s Flower Garden. The National Trust, which manages Osterley Park, notes in its website that the Garden House’s original purpose was:

“… a display house for the collection of rare trees and shrubs that were housed here in the 18thC. The main type of plant that we always grow and display in this building is lemon trees as we have historic evidence that 45 lemon trees were on show here in the 1780’s. We choose to have a mixed display of other interesting specimens alongside the lemons so as to give a greater display and range of interest for our visitors. All of these plants are known to have been either at Osterley in the 18thC or to have been available to grow at that time.”

Although it is not as spectacular as Adam’s interiors of the main house at Osterley Park, the Garden House is both delightful and elegant, a fine feature that enhances the appearance of the formal part of the gardens. This and other buildings designed by the same architect makes me proud to have been given, maybe accidentally, the first names Robert Adam.
Next, I will write about Chiswick House and its grounds and another surprising place not far away from it.
Before the covid19 pandemic that began to loom large in the life of London in about February 2020, we used to set off for a long stay in India around late October or early November. We would hire a cab to take us to Heathrow Airport, which is best accessed from our home via the A4 and then the M4. This route to the airport passes a sign for the entrance to Chiswick House, which is just over three miles from our home as the crow flies. On the way back from Heathrow on our return from India, we always noticed a church tower adorned with a deep blue coloured onion-shaped dome decorated with gold stars about a mile and a half further west from the Chiswick House sign. Until November 2020, neither my wife nor I had ever visited these two places.

The grounds of Chiswick House are a great treat. The house, completed in 1729, was built in neo-Palladian style. It was designed by, and built for, Richard Boyle (1694-1753), an Anglo-Irishman who was an aristocrat, the 3rd Earl of Burlington and 4th Earl of Cork, and an accomplished architect. Burlington demolished an earlier Jacobean mansion, the former home of an Earl of Somerset, that he had inherited from his father and replaced it with what we see today. The writer, art historian, and politician Horace Walpole (1717-1797) wrote that Burlington’s creation:
“… the idea of which is borrowed from a well-known villa of Palladio (that of the Marquis Capra at Vicenza), is a model of taste, though not without faults, some of which are occasioned by too strict adherence to rules and symmetry…”

Yet, these faults, which were apparent to Walpole, should not disturb our enjoyment of the exterior of the building today. John Summerson, author of “Georgian London”, regarded the villa at Chiswick as being “very magnificent” and pointed out that its plan is close to that of Palladio’s Villa Rotonda near Vicenza.
A neo-classical temple in the gardens of Chiswick House
Following the death of its builder, and then of his widow, Chiswick House was owned by the 4th and then 5th Dukes of Devonshire. In 1806, the politician Charles Fox died in the house and twenty-one years later, the Prime Minister Lord Canning also expired within its walls. The house fell into decline in the 19th century. After 1892, it was used as a lunatic asylum, and then in 1929, the 9th Duke of Devonshire sold it to Middlesex County Council, who used it as a fire station for a while. During WW2, one of two wings that had been added to the house (in the late 18th century) was hit by a German V2 rocket. In 1956, the two wings that were not part of the Palladian-style villa were demolished and eventually the fine house designed by Boyle became maintained by English Heritage and accessible to visitors.

The house’s interior does not disappoint. The best rooms on display to the visitor are on its first floor. Under the dome is the octagonal Tribunal or saloon in which visitors were welcomed when they arrived through the main entrance. It acts as a hall from which all the other main rooms on the floor can be reached. I particularly liked the so-called Gallery, a series of three interlinking rooms with decorative ceilings. A passageway leads away from the eastern end of the Gallery. This is known as the ‘Link Building’, and it is blind ending. When the present Chiswick House was built, it acted briefly as a covered connection between the new house and the old Jacobean house, which was demolished soon after the new one was built. Other rooms on the first floor include the Red, Blue, and Green Velvet Rooms, each named according to the colour of their sombre velvet wallpaper. Many of the walls of the house are hung with paintings, most of which had been collected by Lord Burlington on his European travels. The interior of the house does not feel particularly spacious as is the case in many of the other country residences near London that were either built or improved during the 18th century.

A visit to the inside of Chiswick House is worthwhile, but I felt that the tickets were rather too costly for what you get to see. If you do not wish to use an audio guide and various digital innovations, visit the gift shop first and buy a copy of the excellent illustrated guidebook to the house and gardens, which will prove useful for information and as a souvenir (because photography is forbidden within the villa).
The gardens of Chiswick House are not overly large, but they are magnificent. The grounds are full of sculptures; picturesque neo-classical kiosks; garden follies including sculpted columns and a classical temple; long avenues of trees; and precisely trimmed hedges. The centrepiece of the grounds is a long stretch of water. It has a waterfall at one end and a beautiful masonry bridge crossing it further downstream. This water feature is a stretch of Bollo Brook, which was widened by Burlington. The Bollo is a tributary of the Thames. It rises near Ealing Common Underground station and disgorges into the Thames downstream from Barnes Bridge. According to one author, Paul Talling, Bollo Brook:
“…originally formed the boundary of Lord Burlington’s estate in Chiswick. After the estate was extended by the purchase of land the other side of the water in 1726-7, the Brook was widened and canalised…”

The designers of the gardens, Burlington and the celebrated landscaper William Kent (c1685-1748), tried to evoke their ideas about the gardens of Ancient Rome. It was Kent who designed the waterfall, having been inspired by Italian garden decorative features. The grounds, though compact, are richly varied with different vistas around every corner. The elegant bridge crossing the water body was commissioned by Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), wife of the 5th Duke of Devonshire, and built in 1774 to the designs of James Wyatt (1746-1813), a rival of the great architect Robert Adam. Even under the grey skies that accompanied on our first visit, the gardens at Chiswick House are very uplifting.

There is a café a few yards from the Palladian-style building. Its architecture is a complete contrast to the older building but a successful one. Built between 2006 and 2010 in a simple but effective contemporary style with stone colonnades, and designed by Caruso St John Architects, this is one of the most elegant refreshment centres at a ‘stately home’ that I have seen so far. From the tables placed outside this superb example of modern architecture, one can enjoy beverages and snacks whilst admiring the fine 18th century house close by.

*It does not take more than a few minutes to drive along the busy A4 from Chiswick House car park to the building with the blue onion-shaped dome.*
The blue dome, which can be seen by road travellers from Heathrow, tops The Cathedral of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God and Holy Royal Martyrs in London (‘the Dormition’, for short) in Harvard Road. We had seen the dome on countless occasions but never the simple white coloured church to which it is attached. We parked in the small carpark next to a Victorian house where the clergy lives and hoped against hope, because most churches were closed during covid19 lockdowns, that the Russian Orthodox church would be open. And it was.

The church was built in an ancient Russian style in 1999 and contrasts with other Orthodox cathedrals in London such as the Serbian, Greek, and Romanian, which are housed in churches that were originally not used by Orthodox Christians. It is by no means the first Russian Orthodox church in London. That honour goes to a Russian church dedicated to the ‘Dormition’ that was built in 1716 and attached to the Russian Embassy in London. The Russian church moved premises several times, ending up at St Stephens Church in Emperor’s Gate off Gloucester Road. This church was leased from the Scottish Presbyterian Church. When the lease expired in 1989, it was decided to build a new church in Russian style, and this is what we visited in Harvard Road.

A monument close to one of the church’s entrances reads both in Russian and in English:
“In memory of the Holy Royal Martyrs tormented and slain by the Bolsheviks in Ekaterinburg on the 4th of July 1918.”
This is the first monument of this kind that I have seen in the UK. We entered the church through doors beneath a tower with several large bells. We were greeted by a priest whose command of English was good enough to answer our questions. This kindly man allowed us to look around and to take photographs.

The interior of the church is a complete contrast to its plain white exterior. Every surface of the walls and ceiling is decorated with colourful frescos. A large circular lamp holder is suspended beneath the dome in whose roof there is a portrait of the Pantocrator. The panels of the iconostasis were beautifully painted in that ageless style typical of eastern Orthodox church ikon painting. They were painted in about 2008 by craftsmen from Russia, who based their creations on the Moscow style of the 15th and 16th centuries.
My father’s parents were born in Lithuania when it was still part of the Russian Empire. I wonder whether it was this fact or, more likely, because he had passed away a few days earlier that made us mention his recent demise (he died at the age of 101 in November 2020) to the priest. On hearing this, he disappeared through a door in the iconostasis and returned with a candle, which he lit and gave us to place in a holder in front of the painted icons on the sacred screen. When we had done this and stood respectfully, he gave us a small white card and asked us to write my father’s name and dates on it, so that the congregation could pray for his soul on his death anniversaries. We were moved by the kindness of this man who had only just met us, a man whose ancestors might have regarded members of my ancestors’ religion with far less sympathy, or none.

We drove home having experienced two wonderful things, the beauty of Chiswick House and the unexpected kindness of a stranger.

Inside the Russian Cathedral at Chiswick
You might be starting to wonder why I have been mentioning driving in connection with Chiswick House when this book’s title implies that it is about walking. You need not worry because if you wish to be a pedestrian, it is easy to reach Chiswick House from the path running alongside the Thames. A short lane leads from Dukes Meadows (see above) to the gardens of Chiswick House. From there, you can walk along a busy stretch of the six-lane A4 to reach the Russian church.

Next, we move back towards central London, to the former village of Chelsea, which has some associations with the ill-fated Thomas More (1478-1535). Both he and his patron, who was to have him executed, King Henry VIII, had country houses in what was in their time the riverside village of Chelsea.
CHELSEA AND FULHAM

HENRY VIII AND HIS MANOR

Chelsea’s Cheyne Walk runs along the north bank of the River Thames from between the Battersea and Albert Bridges (opened 1890 and 1873, respectively) to 245 yards downstream of the latter. Before 1866, Cheyne Walk ran along the shoreline, but after the construction of Chelsea Embankment it became separated from the waterfront. The narrow Cheyne Mews, which leads off Cheyne Walk has a sign at its entrance that intrigued me. It reads:

“King Henry VIII’s manor house stood here until 1753 when it was demolished after the death of its last occupant, Sir Hans Sloane. Nos. 19 to 26 Cheyne Walk were built on its site in 1759-65. The old manor house garden still lies beyond the end wall of Cheyne Mews and contains some mulberry trees said to have been planted by Queen Elizabeth I.”

The manor and village of Chelsea was already in existence in the Anglo-Saxon era (between the departure of the Romans and 1066), when a document records its name as ‘Cealchylle’. The 11th century Domesday book names it ‘Cercehede’ and ‘Chelched’. The meaning of the name is from an Anglo-Saxon word for ‘landing place for chalk or limestone’. The manor was owned by the Abbey at Westminster until the reign of King Henry VII, when it was in the hands of Sir Reginald Bray (c1440-1503), a highly influential figure during the king’s reign. Next, it changed hands a couple of times before being possessed by William, Lord Sandys (1470-1540), a diplomat, Lord Chamberlain, and a favourite of King Henry VIII (ruled 1509-1547). Sandys, who disapproved of Henry’s marriage to Anne Boleyn (c 1501/07-1536), accompanied the unfortunate Anne to the Tower of London, where she was imprisoned.
In 1536, Sandys gave the manor to King Henry VIII. The much-married king gave it to his last spouse, Katherine Parr (1512-1548) as a wedding gift. She lived in the manor house after the coronation of King Edward VI in January 1547 until she died. After her death, the manor was owned by the soldier and politician John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland (1504-1553). Then the manor passed through many owners until the physician and founder of the British Museum Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) bought it in 1712 from the Tory politician Lord William Cheyne (1657-1728).

There were two manor houses in Chelsea, an old one and a new one. The old one, which was given to the Lawrence family by Henry VIII was close to Chelsea Old Church that stands to the west of the Albert Bridge. The New Manor House stood on Cheyne Walk where we saw the sign. It stood near a coffee house that was flourishing when Sloane bought the manor, Don Saltero’s Coffee House. This establishment was founded in 1695 by James Salter. Salter’s was originally a barber’s shop until Sloane began donating unwanted specimens to his former servant and travelling companion, the owner of Salter’s. Salter displayed these specimens (botanical, zoological, and other), collected on Sloane’s travels, in cabinets and gradually the barber shop was transformed into ‘Don Saltero’s Coffee House and Curiosity Museum’. This establishment attracted local men to become its customers, including Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727), who died in in Kensington (see above).

Sloane’s purchase was a shrewd investment because at the time London was expanding westwards. His biographer James Delbourgo wrote: “The manor cost the considerable sum of £17,800 and included a total of eleven houses and the Manor House itself … As a suburban equivalent of a country seat, the manor grounded Sloane’s gentlemanly identity. It also bought him about 90 acres of land … as a freeholder, and an unknown number of tenements, on which he began to collect his own rents.”

I found an engraving showing the appearance of the Chelsea manor house that stood on Cheyne Walk. It is in a book published in the 1880s. The image resembles that included on a map of Chelsea surveyed in 1664 by James Hamilton and redrawn in 1717, but the exact location of the house is not marked on the map.
Apart from the commemorative sign at Cheyne Mews and the garden, to which we were unable to gain access, King Henry VIII’s manor house has completely disappeared. I wondered whether Chelsea’s Kings Road had any links to Henry VIII’s ownership of the manor, but it does not. It began as a private road used by King Charles II, who came to the throne long after Henry VIII. Charles used it when travelling from London to Kew, and it was only made a public thoroughfare in 1830. The site of the former manor house owned by Sloane is but a few minutes’ walk from the Chelsea Physic Garden, some of whose land was leased to the Society of Apothecaries for a small amount by Sloane when he acquired the manor.

**SLOANE RANGER**

The Chelsea Physic Garden is one of London’s almost-hidden treats, a veritable ‘secret garden’ next to the River Thames in Chelsea. Established in 1673 by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London, this garden was created to teach students of apothecary (now ‘pharmacology’) about the identification of ‘useful’ plants and how to distinguish them from those that are valueless in treating medical conditions. Over the centuries, it has become a repository (or living library) of plants of use to man, both medically and otherwise. A statue stands in the middle of the garden. It depicts Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), who was one of the Garden’s greatest benefactors.

Sloane was born in what is now Northern Ireland (Ulster). He studied medicine, first in London where he shared lodgings with Nicholas Staphorst, the apothecary who provided him with comprehensive knowledge about chemical medicines. He also studied anatomy and ‘physic’ (i.e., medicine or the art of healing) along with botany, which he studied at the Chelsea Physic Garden. After four years, he qualified as a doctor and then spent three months in Paris working and studying at both the Jardin Royal des Plantes and the Hôpital de la Charité. In 1683, he received his degree of Doctor of Physic from the University of Orange-Nassau (in the Netherlands), having first studied at the University of Montpellier.
After his studies abroad, Sloane returned to England, where he learned medical skills from the physician Thomas Sydenham (1624-1689), who has been called ‘the father of English medicine’ and ‘the English Hippocrates’. On 12 April 1687, Sloane was admitted a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (London). It was then that he received the invitation to become the personal physician of Christopher Monck (1653-1688), Second duke of Albemarle, who had just been appointed Governor of Jamaica. The Dictionary of National Biography (‘DNB’) noted:

“Sloane saw here an opportunity not only to serve his prestigious master and his family but also ‘to see what I can meet withal that is extraordinary in nature in those places’, acknowledging too that the voyage ‘seem'd likewise to promise to be useful to me, as a Physician; many of the Antient and best Physicians having travell’d to the Places whence their Drugs were brought, to inform themselves concerning them’ … Ray and another friend, Martin Lister, were particularly encouraging, setting out a number of questions which Sloane might answer on the spot and further desiring him to ‘collect & transmette hither’ specimens of all kinds…”

During the 15 months that Sloane spent in Jamaica, he observed everything and amassed a huge collection of specimens of all kinds including at least 800 plant specimens, most of which were new to the English scientific community. His last task as a doctor in Jamaica was to embalm the body of his patron, the Duke (who died in October 1688), prior to it's shipment to England.

Much of what Sloane collected on his trip to the Caribbean and throughout the rest of his life, and he collected all manner of items, formed the basis of the collections of the now world-renowned British Museum (‘BM’). It was his idea to establish the BM and his enormous legacy that financed its founding.

Sloane was a successful and prosperous physician. In May 1695, Hans Sloane married Elizabeth (née Langley), the widow of Fulke Rose (1644-c1694), a British physician and a major purchaser of slaves in Jamaica. Rose was a “resident slave-owner in Jamaica, owner of Mickleton, Knollis and Sixteen Mile Walk”.

| 170 |
Now, we enter the realms of the murkier aspects of British history. When I saw Sloane’s dates and learnt of his wealth, I had a feeling that slavery might well have been involved in his story. During his time in Jamaica, which is recorded in great detail in his book “A voyage to the islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica with the natural history of the herbs and trees, four footed beasts, fishes, birds, insects, reptiles, &c. of the last of those islands; to which is prefix’d, an introduction, wherein is an account of the inhabitants, air, waters, diseases, trade, &c. of that place, with some relations concerning the neighbouring continent, and islands of America…”, published in 1707, Sloane had plenty of opportunity to observe slavery in action and record it in, occasionally gory, detail. Also, he was able to acquire a stock of quinine, which was needed to mitigate the effects of malaria, which in his time was quite prevalent in England. Digressing a little, I read that malaria was still prevalent in the Hoo Peninsula (north Kent) at the beginning of the 20th century.

Sloane’s marriage to Fulke’s widow Elizabeth proved to be financially advantageous because she inherited not only her father’s wealth but also one third of the not inconsiderable earnings from her first husband’s properties in Jamaica. This money must have helped Sloane buy the Manor of Chelsea from the estate of Charles Cheyne (1625-1698) in 1712. According to the historian of the Physic Garden, Sue Minter, in her book “The Apothecarie’s Garden”:

“Unable to afford the freehold of the Garden from Lord Cheyne at £400, a deputation from the Society of Apothecaries in 1714 requested a transfer of ownership of the Garden from their new landlord. Agreement was reached in principle in 1718, though not concluded until 1722. Thus it was that the wealth of Jamaica contributed to the long term security and survival of nearly 4 acres in the heart of Chelsea.”

Just in case what I have just told you has moved you to angrily demolish or topple Sloane’s statue, you should not even begin to think of it because you will not erase history, as what stands in the high walled Garden is not the original statue sculpted by the Flemish Johannes Michel (or John Michael) Rysbrack (1694-1770), who settled in England in 1720. What you see in the Garden is a replica, a cast of the original made in jesmonite (a stone and resin mixture). The original was moved away to an indoor location. It was not removed from the Garden for fear of vandalism, but because of deterioration caused by atmospheric pollution.
Regardless of your sensitivity to a place’s history or interests in botany or pharmacology, I can strongly recommend a visit to the Chelsea Physic Garden. Entering this beautifully laid out, ancient haven for plants is like reliving the joys of reading “The Secret Garden” by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

Sloane is commemorated all over Chelsea. You can discover that from a sample of its place names: Sloane Street, Sloane Square, Sloane Avenue, and Sloane Gardens. Flattering as it must be to have streets named after you, it must be less flattering to lend your name to a particular class of people, which is not held in high regard by most people. The ‘Sloane Ranger’, always female, is according to one on-line definition:

“A young stereotypically blonde woman who likes hanging out in Chelsea, primarily on the Kings Road in London. She is generally public school educated and her most popular university choices are either Oxbridge, Bristol or Edinburgh. In the late 90’s this woman would not be seen without her pastel pashmina. Being called a Sloane Ranger indicates that you are of a generally reasonable class level, however, it also indicates a certain vacuousness/air-head like attitude and snobbishness.”

The male equivalent of this kind of person is known as a ‘Hooray Henry’, and they are not too hard to find in Chelsea.

Henry VIII owned property in Chelsea. One of his neighbours was his adviser, Thomas More, who eventually fell into disfavour with the monarch and ended up losing his head.
FROM CHELSEA TO CHISWICK HOUSE

Between 1521 and his arrest in 1535, Beaufort House in Chelsea was the home of Henry VIII’s ill-fated advisor, Thomas More (1478-1535). After More’s death, the property passed through the hands of several owners, the last of which was the physician and founder of the British Museum Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753). He bought the house and its grounds in 1737.

During 1739 and 1740, Sloane demolished Beaufort House, and sold parts of it and its grounds to be used in other buildings. One of the items he sold was an elegant gateway designed by the British architect Inigo Jones (1573-1652), who introduced the neo-classical style to the UK. The gateway, which was constructed in 1621, used to serve as an entrance to the grounds of the house from Kings Road. The gateway, which now stands next to Chiswick House in west London, bears a carved stone with the words: “Given by Sir Hans Sloane, Baronet to the Earl of Burlington 1738.”

Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington and 4th Earl of Cork (1694-1753), an architect, built the present Palladian-style mansion at Chiswick in 1717. An admirer of Inigo Jones, he was happy to install the gateway from Beaufort House close to his recently constructed building in Chiswick. Contrary to what appears on the inscription, he paid for the gateway rather than receiving it as a gift from Sloane.

A poem by the architect and landscape designer William Kent (c1685-1748) relates the story of this fine gateway (quoted from “The Palladian Revival. Lord Burlington, His Villa and Garden at Chiswick” by John Harris):

“Ho! Gate, how came ye here?  
I came fro’ Chelsea the last yere  
Inigo Jones there put me together  
Then was I dropping by wind and weather  
Sir Hannes Sloane  
Let me alone  
But Burlington brought me hither  
This architecton-ical  
Gate Inigo Jon-ical  
Was late Hans Slon-ical  
And now Burlington-ical”
Burlington was so keen to have the gate that he agreed to pay Sloane however much it was valued.

As far as I can see, the gateway serves no other function than as a decorative garden feature. Burlington was a keen collector of the architectural drawings of Inigo Jones and had seen the Beaufort House gateway amongst them. As an enthusiast, he must have been thrilled to have acquired an actual work by the architect he admired. So, apart from being a garden feature, it was a fine collector’s item. I feel that it is a pity that he did not rescue more from the house that Sloane demolished because old drawings and plans of it make it appear as if it was a remarkable edifice.

By now you might be wondering about the whereabouts of More’s former home Beaufort House. Please, read on.

UTOPIA AND WORLDS END

Sir Thomas More, the author of “Utopia”, which was published in Latin in 1516, had a residence, Beaufort House, in London’s Chelsea. It was not far from Henry VIII’s manor house on what is now Cheyne Walk. The extensive plot of land in which More’s house was built was bounded to the north by what was, and still is, the Kings Road, to the south by the River Thames and between the still extant Milman and Old Church Streets.

The house was ‘L’ shaped in plan when More used it as his out-of-town dwelling between 1520 and 1535 (when he was arrested there and taken to the Tower of London). His arrest was in connection with trying to upset the marriage plans of his neighbour in Chelsea, King Henry VIII. More lived at Beaufort House, to which he loved to escape from London and from the Court, for writing and spending time with his family. It was here that he entertained many friends, among whom were the scholar Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) and the artist Hans Holbein, the Younger (c1497-1543), who painted More in 1527.
After Thomas More’s execution and the death of Henry VIII, King Edward VI granted Beaufort House to William Pawlet, 1st Marquis of Winchester (c1484-1572). Then, it passed through the hands of the Dacre family to William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520-1598), and next to his son, Sir Robert Cecil (1563-1612). Cecil sold it to Henry (Clinton) Fiennes, Earl of Lincoln (1539-1616). The house and its grounds continued to move through different owners until it came into the possession of the physician and founder of the British Museum, Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) in 1738.

Sloane demolished Beaufort House in 1740 to “…strip it for parts…”, so wrote James Delbourgo in “Collecting the World”, his recent biography of Sloane. The demolition work was executed by a Quaker, Edmund Howard (1710-1798). He was Sloane’s gardener in Chelsea. During the demolition, he was often in dispute with Sloane over money. Howard observed that: “… the receiving of money was to Sir Hans Sloane more pleasing than parting with it.”

Little remains of what Sloane demolished apart from a few brick walls. However, one fine relic, an elegant neo-classical gateway designed by Inigo Jones, was sold to Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington and placed near his Chiswick House, as already related.

The northwest corner of Thomas More’s former Chelsea estate is a peaceful walled garden, which can be entered from Kings Road. Some of these walls are the Tudor brickwork from More’s time at Beaufort House. The north side of the almost square plot is occupied by a line of small buildings belonging to the Moravian Church Fetter Lane Congregation (Chelsea). These buildings, which include the curate’s house, a tiny chapel, and a meeting hall, once a church, face a large square patch of lawn with four fig trees in its centre. Closer examination of the lawn reveals that it contains numerous square gravestones that lie flush with the mowed grass. This is the Moravian Burial Ground.

Protestant missionaries from Moravia (now in the Czech Republic) founded a church in Fetter Lane in the City of London in 1742. The missionaries were hoping to travel to the British colonies to carry the Gospel to people out there, notably slaves. However, they realised that there was plenty for them to do in England and worked alongside British missionaries such as the Wesleyans. The church in Fetter Lane survived until WW2 when it was destroyed by bombing. In the 1960s, the congregation moved west to its present site.
The burial ground was established in the former stable yard of Beaufort House and the first burial was done in 1751. About 400 people have been buried in this cemetery. Amongst them was Henry, the 73rd Count of Reuss, brother-in-law of Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf (1700-1760). It was the latter who leased Lindsey House in Chelsea, built on the estate of Sir Thomas More, and used it between 1749 and 1755 as his base for missionary work in England. Zinzendorf was extremely critical of slavery.

At the south edge of the burial lawn, there is a stone pergola and a bench with an elaborately carved wooden backrest. Both were created by the sculptors Ernest (1874-1951) and Mary Gillick (1881-1965), who leased the site of the Moravian cemetery between 1914 and 1964. Mary designed the effigy of Elizabeth II used on coinage in the United Kingdom from 1953 to 1970. The long wooden bench is decorated with painted shields, showing the coats-of-arms of all the owners of Beaufort House and its estate from More to Sloane. It also has a brief history of Beaufort House carved into it.

From the oasis that is the Moravian Church’s ground, it is but a short walk west along Kings Road to the large Worlds End Distillery pub, which was already present in the 17th century. The present pub was built in 1897. It is, to quote one source:
“… a public house in the gin-palace genre …”

As for the name ‘Worlds End’, this might not be as apocalyptic as it first appears because ‘end’ often used to mean ‘field’ in archaic English. Regarding the ‘World’ part of the name, Edward Walford wrote in about 1880:
“In the King's Road, near Milman Street, is an inn styled 'The World's End'. The old tavern ... was a noted house of entertainment in the reign of Charles II ...The house was probably called ‘The World's End’ on account of its then considerable distance from London, and the bad and dangerous state of the roads and pathways leading to it.”

Posh ‘Sloane Rangers’ and ‘Hooray Henrys’ of Chelsea might regard Worlds End as truly the end of their part of the world because west of it the shops and dwellings on Kings Road seem far less opulent than those on the stretch between the pub and Sloane Square. At Worlds End, the utopian world of the ‘Sloane Rangers’ and ‘Hooray Henrys’ transforms into unglamorous world of routine inner-city life. Should these characters carelessly stray as far west as Worlds End, they might consider that they have strayed to the ‘wrong side of the tracks’
I have mentioned Lindsey House briefly. Now, I will discuss it in more detail as it played an important role in my youth.

**MUSIC BY THE RIVER**

A row of houseboats is permanently moored alongside the bank of the River Thames that runs past Chelsea’s Cheyne Walk. The floating dwellings are faced by Lindsey House, one of the oldest buildings in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Built in 1674 by Robert Bertie, 3rd Earl of Lindsey (1630-1701) on land that was once part of Thomas More’s riverside garden, it was remodelled by Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf (1700-1760) for London’s Moravian community in 1750.

Five years later, the edifice was divided into separate dwellings. Today, they are numbered 96 to 101 Cheyne Walk. The American artist James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) lived in number 96, and the engineers Sir Marc Isambard Brunel (1769-1849) and his son Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859) lived in number 98. My friends Kit and Sheridan Russell lived in a ground floor flat in number 100. They had moved there in 1959.

I first met Russells during one of our annual family holidays to Venice (Italy). Kit, who was a colleague of my father at the London School of Economics, and her husband used to stay in the Pensione Seguso that was next door to the Pensione La Calcina, where John Ruskin (1819-1900) once stayed. We used to stay in Venice during my childhood in the 1960s. During one of our holidays, we stopped to talk with Kit and Sheridan in Venice, and they asked me whether I liked classical music. When I told them that I did, they said that they would invite me to some of their musical evenings held some Saturdays in their home. I attended quite a few of these during the second half of the 1960s.
On arrival at 100 Cheyne Walk, Kit used to welcome the guests by offering them coloured sugar-coated almonds, which she described as ‘stones of Venice’, an allusion to Ruskin’s book, “The Stones of Venice”, because the confectionery had been purchased in that city. After discarding coats, all the guests, twenty to thirty in number, had to find somewhere to sit in the large, low-ceilinged living room filled with an assortment of seats, cushions, and a mattress. Some of the guests sat on the floor. I was always directed by Kit to the same seat. She used to want me to sit next to the telephone, which was on a windowsill. She always told me: “If it rings during the music, dear, lift the receiver and quickly say: ‘Sorry, we are having a party. Please ring again tomorrow’”

It never did ring, but I used to sit nervously in anticipation of having to perform my important duty.

Sheridan was a fine ‘cellist, who knew many professional musicians, all of them quite famous. He used to invite several musicians, anything from two to four, to perform a couple of chamber works with him. Kit knew what was to be performed at each soirée, but the invited musicians were not told until they arrived (at the same time as the audience). Without rehearsing together, Kit and his musical guests performed chamber works, often by Brahms and Beethoven, beautifully from ‘scratch’ (except for Sheridan, who had rehearsed his part).

The acoustics of the 17th (or 18th) century living room were perfect for the music performed. These wonderful evenings engendered my enduring love of the chamber music of Brahms, Beethoven, and Mozart. During the music, Kit sat a few feet away from Sheridan on his right. Her eyes never wandered from him, and she always smiled sweetly as he played. Whenever we saw them in Venice, they were always walking hand-in-hand like two young lovers. I believe that Kit and Sheridan married late in life. Sheridan told me once that he was pleased when he married, because as a married man he was able to perform a service, for which only married people were eligible at the time. He was at last able to become a marriage guidance counsellor.

Sheridan told me once that there was a lot of planning before putting on each musical evening. He ensured that none of his guest musicians ever played the same piece together more than once. Also, he tried to make sure that nobody in the audience ever heard the same combinations of pieces more than once. He did this by recording (in a set of notebooks) who had played what and with which other musicians and which pieces each guest had heard.
Two works were played at each soirée. During the interval, everyone stood up, many relieved to get off the not always comfortable seating provided. Kit served glasses of red wine and crackers with small pieces of a mild-flavoured, yellow hard cheese that contained cumin seeds. Every soirée, the same refreshments were provided.

A few of the musicians that I can remember hearing playing with Sheridan included the violinist Maria Lidka (1914-2013) and her son, a ‘cellist; individual players from the Amadeus Quartet; the pianist Peter Gellhorn (1912-2004); and once the pianist Louis Kentner (1905-1987). At the end of the evening when Kentner had played, Kit asked him to give me a lift part of the way back to northwest London. He agreed, but as we drove together, I had a distinct feeling that this famous pianist was not at all keen about giving me a lift and said not a word to me during the short journey.

As Sheridan grew older, he became increasingly frail and began looking gaunt. During the last few concerts I attended, I noticed that he covered his hands with woollen fingerless gloves. Maybe, he had a circulation problem. Sheridan died in 1991. Kit lived on another seven years.

Whereas back in the 1960s, when I used to attend the musical evenings at Lindsey House, one could walk from the street to the front door, today this is impossible without being able to unlock a gate leading into the grounds of the house. Currently owned by the National Trust and rented to tenants, Lindsey House is rarely opened to the public. Fortunately, we did once manage to attend one of these openings, but all seemed to have changed since I last listened to chamber music being played close to the river.

*Close to Lindsey House, there is an interesting remnant of London’s past, Cremorne Gardens.*
Gateway designed by Inigo Jones. 
It used to be at Thomas More’s Beaufort House in Chelsea. 
Now, it stands next to Chiswick House.

TURNER AND BALLOONS IN CHELSEA

Before the covid19 pandemic gripped the world, many Londoners made outings to pleasure grounds such as Legoland, Thorpe Park, and further afield to Disneyland near Paris. During the late 18th century, Londoners seeking entertainment headed for places such as Vauxhall Gardens, Ranelagh (now, the grounds of Royal Hospital Chelsea, part of which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren, built in about 1692, and now site of the Chelsea Flower Show), and Cuper’s (across the Thames opposite Somerset House). These pleasure gardens began to decline, some before, and others during, the 19th century. However, in their wake, another such place came into existence, Cremorne Gardens in Chelsea.
Thomas Dawson, 1st Viscount Cremorne (1725-1813), an Irish landowner, possessed a plot of land on the north side of the Thames, just west of where Battersea Bridge stands today. There, he had a mansion, Chelsea Farm, which was often visited by royalty: King George III, his wife Queen Charlotte, and the future George IV. In 1825, the property came into the possession of Granville Penn (1761-1844), a cousin of Cremorne’s widow. Penn’s claim to fame is that he was involved in the establishment of what is now The Royal Veterinary College, near Kings Cross in London.

Penn did much to improve the grounds of the estate, but later sold it. The house and grounds were bought in 1831 by Charles Random De Berenger, Baron De Beaufain, who created the Cremorne Pleasure Gardens. The great beauty of the grounds led it to being opened by De Berenger as a public pleasure ground known at first as ‘The Stadium’. De Berenger was: “… a sportsman and in the grounds opened Cremorne Stadium. Members who paid their two or three guineas could, under the Baron’s instruction, shoot, box, and practise “manly exercises generally” in the grounds.”

Today, there is a Stadium Street located in what would have once been part of Cremorne’s estate.

The Baron died in 1845 and the estate grounds were sold. They were laid out tastefully and the place, opened as a public pleasure ground that attracted large crowds of people seeking relaxation and entertainment, who were willing to pay modest fees for it. The gardens flourished between 1845 and 1877. In 1850, they came under the ownership of Thomas Bartlett Simpson, who also purchased Ashburnham House (an 18th century edifice) on the west side of the estate, which he used to house some of his visitor attractions. The grounds offered visitors many attractions including dancing; meals; secluded areas; firework displays; theatres for farce and vaudeville; ballets; puppet shows; trapeze artists; tight-rope walkers; a maze; and balloon ascents.

In his 1880’s “Old and New London”, Edward Walford describes some of the exploits with balloons, which were not without excitement. In 1839, whilst the gardens were owned by De Berenger, a Mr Hampton equipped with a parachute ascended two miles above the ground with a balloon and then descended to the ground with his parachute. Some years later, Vincent De Groof ascended from Cremorne Gardens in a contraption suspended from a balloon and designed to help him fly. After reaching a high altitude, something went wrong and poor De Groof fell to his death.
By the 1870s, the Cremorne Gardens were becoming disreputable, especially they were notorious for prostitution. After they closed (for financial reasons), the land became used for building houses and other buildings including the Lots Road Power Station, which was built by 1904 and remained in use until 2002. Currently, the power station and its surrounding land are undergoing development to create new housing.

In about 1846, the artist JMW Turner (1775-1851) moved into a house by the river on what is now Cremorne Road, close to Cremorne Gardens and to the Cremorne Pier. He constructed a kind of gallery on its roof, from which he could sit and observe the changing light on the river. According to a biography by Peter Ackroyd, Turner was unwell whilst he lived there, suffering from dental problems that caused him to lose all his teeth, and consequent dietary-related illness. He remained in Cremorne Road until the last year of his life and died there.

Today, little remains of the former pleasure garden except a few street names and a small park next to the river, named ‘Cremorne Gardens’. This delightful, small open space has a paved section as well as a lawn. It is but a tiny fragment of the original Cremorne Gardens but a fitting memorial to a place that provided entertainment for Londoners over many years. A couple of jetties project into the river. These were originally landing stages for visitors arriving at the Gardens by river boat. Another souvenir of the heyday of the Gardens is a pair of wrought iron gates that stand in the present plot, but not in their original position, now built over. Small though it is, with its superb views of the Thames, the present Cremorne Gardens is a pleasant place to visit, within a short distance from the fashionable Kings Road.

A short distance east of Cremorne Gardens and standing next to the Thames, there is a fascinating building, with historical connections to Thomas More.
KING RICHARD III AND THEN MORE

Seen from across the Thames at Battersea Park, it looks like a Tudor palace in immaculate condition standing on the Chelsea bank of the river. But do not be fooled because much of it, Crosby Hall, was built between 1910 and about 1926. Part of the building is far older, dating back to mediaeval times and it was moved from the heart of the City of London to its present location in Chelsea in 1910, as I will explain.

In 1466, Sir John Crosby (died 1476), alderman and a sheriff of London, built his mansion, Crosby Place, on land just east of Bishopsgate (near the present Liverpool Street Station) leased to him by the Prioress St Helens Bishopsgate, a church nearby. After Crosby died, Crosby Place was owned by the Duke of Gloucester (1452-1485), who was to become King Richard III, of Shakespearian fame. John Timbs in his “Curiosities of London” (published in 1855) suggests that in 1598, Shakespeare had lodgings near to Crosby Place. In Act 1, scene 2 of his play, “Richard III”, the Duke of Gloucester says:

“And presently repair to Crosby House;
     Where (after I have solemnly interr’d
     At Chertsey monast’ry this noble king,
     And wet his grave with my repentant tears)
     I will with all expedient duty see you.
     For diverse unknown reasons, I beseech you,
     Grant me this boon.”

Writing in 1603 in his “The Survey of London”, John Stow (1524/25-1605) noted:
“Then you have one great house called Crosby Place, because the same was built by Sir John Crosby, grocer and Woolman … This house he built of stone and timber, very large and beautiful, and the highest at that time in London … he was buried in St Helen’s, the parish church…”
Stow also recorded that in the late 16th century several ambassadors lived in the house. The fourth owner of Crosby Place was the senior government official, Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), whose head was removed at the Tower of London after disagreements with his ‘boss’, King Henry VIII. It has been suggested by Timbs that More wrote his books “Utopia” (1516) and “History of Richard the Third” (1512-1519) whilst residing at Crosby Place. In 1523, More sold Crosby Place to his friend, the banker and merchant Antonio Bonvisi (died 1558) from Lucca in Italy. Interestingly, More moved to his house in Chelsea after leaving Crosby Place. As already described, his riverside home, the former Beaufort House was in Chelsea. It stood a few yards away from the present Crosby Hall.

The ownership of Crosby Place changed several times after More sold it. Sir Walter Raleigh lived there in 1601. Between 1621 and 1638, the Place was home to the East India Company (founded 1600). Soon after 1642, fire struck the property, and it was never again used as a residence. The conflagration spared the great hall, which became known as Crosby Hall. During the Civil War, it was used as a prison for Royalists. In 1672, it was converted into a Presbyterian meeting house, and was used as such until 1769. Next, the hall was used as a packer’s warehouse. The packer’s lease expired in 1831. Following that and public concern about its condition, the hall was restored in about 1836. Timbs noted that it was:

“… the finest example in the metropolis of the domestic mansion Perpendicular work … The glory of the place is, however, the roof which is an elaborate architectural study, and decidedly one of the finest examples of timber-work in existence. It differs from many other examples in being an inner roof…”

From Timbs’s detailed description, it sounds as if it was a spectacular creation.

Following its restoration, Crosby Hall became used for musical performances and as a meeting place for literary societies. In 1868, Crosby Hall became a restaurant. The Hall was sold to the Chartered Bank of India, Australia, and China in 1907. The bank wanted to destroy what was one of the oldest buildings in the City of London, one of the few survivors of the Great Fire of 1666. These plans caused a public outcry. In 1910, the Hall was dismantled and moved stone by stone to its present site in Chelsea, opposite Battersea Park. There, it was reassembled and Tudor-style additions, designed by the architect Walter Godfrey (1881-1961), were constructed.
During WW1, the relocated and enlarged Crosby Hall was used to house refugees from war-torn Belgium. Between 1925 and 1968, the Hall was leased by the British Federation of University Women. Following the anti-Jewish laws passed by the Nazis in 1933, Crosby Hall provided residential fellowships for Jewish women academics who had fled from Hitler’s Germany. After 1988, Crosby Hall became a private residence.

One day, I hope that I will be able to see the superb hammer beam roof in Crosby Hall. I wonder how it compares with the wonderful example that can be seen in Middle Temple Hall, in which Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” was first performed in 1602.
Close to the relocated Crosby Hall there is a statue of Sir Thomas More, seated and looking across the Thames. This statue is appropriately located between what is left of his old home, which used to be in Bishopsgate, and the land on which his Chelsea mansion used to stand. Sculpted by Leslie Cubitt Bevis (1892-1984) in the 1960s, it has a gold-coloured face. In connection with this, Clive Duncan, who studied with Cubitt Bevis at Camberwell School of Art, noted:

“Cubitt’s studio was in the basement of his home in Eccleston Square under the headquarters of the Buddhist Society which was housed on the ground floor … The gold face of More is difficult to explain. Cubitt was influenced by the Buddhist sculptures he saw each day as he passed the Society entrance above his studio, he also admired Byzantine art that used colour and gold in the icons. Gold leaf was selected and at that time it was a warm gold - it must have been re-gilded recently (2018) as it is slightly acidic.”

Before leaving Chelsea, here is an interesting cemetery is laid out along the western edge of the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, the western boundary of the former Borough of Chelsea. The graveyard, almost rectangular in plan, extends between Old Brompton Road, which forms its northern edge and Fulham Road, which marks its southernmost extent.
The southern entrance to Brompton Cemetery is a few yards west of the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, which, I can say with the benefit of personal experience, is well-run and efficient. The cemetery is richly populated with memorials to the dead, but it is a remarkably lively place on a sunny day, being filled with walkers, cyclists, and even picnickers. Currently it is maintained by The Royal Parks. It is laid out on either side of a long central avenue, part of which is bordered by elegant 19th century buildings on either side of a domed chapel, arranged to resemble the circular colonnades in Rome’s St Peter’s Square. The bodies of people from all walks of life and from many nations lie at rest beneath the many stones and within many mausolea created in a variety of decorative styles. The cemetery was first opened in 1840.

The cemetery contains the remains of many famous people who have died since it was opened. It is still being used for interments today. To list the ‘great and good’, who have been buried here would be lengthy and tedious. So, I will only name a tiny selection: Sir Samuel Cunard; Emmeline Pankhurst; George Borrow; Sir William Crookes; Bernard Levin; Richard Tauber; George Henty; Samuel Leigh Sotheby; Valentine Prinsep; and Constant Lambert. And so, the list goes on. As most of these people are quite well-known, I will focus on two less well-known individuals whose graves caught my attention during a recent wander around the cemetery. Both of them had military careers and eye-catching funerary monuments.

The first of these is a pink granite slab resting on stone cannon balls made of grey granite. A pile of similar cannon balls is arranged like a pyramid on top of the stone. It is a particularly fitting design for a soldier’s gravestone. One of the cannon balls is carved with the word ‘BEYROUT’ and another with ‘PORTUGAL’. This is the memorial to General Alexander Anderson (1807-1877), of the Royal Marine Light Infantry. The monument was restored in about 2016. A document relating to its restoration informs that three of the cannon balls are engraved “Syria”, “Beyrout” (i.e. Beirut), and
“Gaze” (i.e. Gaza). However, I photographed one bearing the word “Portugal”, which is not mentioned in the document. The monument was erected by Anderson’s friend Richard Eustace, MD, who lived from 1833 to 1908.

Anderson became a Companion of the Order of the Bath in June 1869. His obituary in the London “Morning Post”, which shows why he was awarded this high honour, includes mention of Portugal:

“He obtained his first commission as second lieutenant in the Royal Marine Forces in May, 1823, and had during half a century seen much active service. He served with the army of occupation in Portugal, and was for some time quartered at Fort St. Julian. He served at the battle of Navarino in 1827, and at the commencement of the action boarded with his men one of the Turkish ships and captured the flag. … He served throughout the campaign on the coast of Syria in 1840-41 … was at the attack and capture of Beyrout; the bombardment and surrender of St. Jean d’Acre; the surrender of Jaffa, and was a volunteer in the expedition against Gaza. … He had received the war medal with two clasps, also the Turkish silver medal from the Sultan, and when a colonel, received the good-service pension. He became colonel-commandant in November, 1859; major-general in March, 1860; lieutenant-general in November, 1866; and general in April, 1870.”

A memorial, less original in design than that of Anderson, also caught my attention because of it has a bas-relief carving depicting an old-fashioned biplane heading away from a large flying zeppelin from which clouds of smoke are billowing. The grave marks the resting place of Flight-Sub-Lieutenant Reginald Alexander John Warneford (1891-1915). The stone bears the words:

“Accidentally killed 17 June 1915.”

Given the year he died (in the middle of WW1) and his rank, it was hard to imagine what kind of accident caused him to die during a war when most fatalities were not described as ‘accidents’.

Warneford was born in Darjeeling (India), son of an engineer working for the railways in British India. He was educated first in England and then in Simla, back in India. According to an article about him, his father:

“…taught him the law of the jungle; to read the moon and stars across the wide Indian night skies; to be able to study cloud formations. Rex rode on
the footplates of the service engines, rode the work elephants and hunted tigers.”

At the outbreak of WW1, he joined the British Army and then was soon transferred to the Royal Naval Air Service to be trained as a pilot. He was a good student even if somewhat overconfident. Soon, he became involved in hunting down and intercepting German Zeppelin airships that were being sent to attack London and other targets in the UK.

On Sunday, the 6th of June 1915, Warneford was sent in a Morane Saulnier L monoplane to intercept the heavily armed and well-powered LZ37, a 521-foot-long German zeppelin, which had just taken off from Belgium and had got lost in the fog over the English Channel. German radio signals, intercepted by the British, discovered that the airship had been ordered to return to base. Warneford was sent out to find and attack it. He reached the airship when it was 10,000 feet over Bruges. Warneford rose to 11,000 feet and dropped six bombs onto the Zeppelin, which burst into flames. The hot air from the explosion caused Warneford’s ‘plane to go into a spin and damaged its fuel line. Warneford managed to land in a field behind enemy lines. After rapidly repairing the damage, he managed to fly back to safety, not before landing to refuel at a French base en-route. On the 8th of June, he was awarded the prestigious Victoria Cross for gallantry. Just before that, he was also awarded:

“Chevalier de la Legion D’Honneur with its automatic companion, the Croix de Guerre’ that had been recommended by General Joffre.”

Modestly, he told a friend that in comparison to his grandfather, who had constructed railways in India:

“Bringing down the LZ37 was just routine and over in a flash. But building a railway, that was something.”

Returning to duty after his heroic activity, Warneford’s next mission was to take a new Henry Farman F27 biplane on a test flight. He took off from Paris on the 17th of June 1915 with an American reporter as a passenger. At 2000 feet, the aircraft began to disintegrate and fall downwards. It turned upside down at 700 feet and both pilot and passenger, who were not strapped in, fell to the ground. The reporter died instantly but Warneford survived. However, he died on his way to a hospital.
Had Warneford died whilst attacking a Zeppelin or during any other military encounter, his death would not have been regarded as accidental. As his death was a consequence of an unforeseen disaster, I suppose that calling it an ‘accident’ is appropriate.

The graves I have described in detail are two of many I saw that attracted my attention. Many of the other persons buried in this fascinating cemetery are described on a website hosted by The Royal Parks.

Fulham Road that runs along the southern boundary of Brompton Cemetery runs southwest through Fulham to reach Putney Bridge. I am not an enthusiast of Fulham as it is today, but it does contain a historic building, once of great significance, close to the River Thames. Fulham Palace, like many other buildings of great importance constructed several centuries ago, for example Westminster, Hampton Court, the Tower of London, Chiswick House, and Thomas More’s Beaufort House, were located close to the river. In those far-off days, travelling by water was probably quicker, safer, and far more comfortable, than jolting along poorly made roads populated by highwaymen and the ‘hoi polloi’.
John Rocque’s map, surveyed in 1745 shows Fulham as a small riverside village next to both a bridge across the Thames and an enclosure, larger than the village, containing the grounds of Fulham Palace. Another map drawn in 1816 shows that Fulham was still a village separated from its neighbour, Chelsea village, and the rest of London by sparsely inhabited open countryside. Between about 1860 and 1900, Fulham became engulfed by London’s western urban spread.

The name Fulham has at least two possible derivations. One is ‘the place of birds or fowl’. The other, less flattering, is ‘foul or muddy dwelling (or home)’. During the Civil War, the Parliamentarians built a bridge of boats from Fulham to the opposite bank to allow their forces to cross into Surrey, where they began to chase the Royalist forces following the Battle of Brentford. The first fixed bridge was wooden and opened in 1729, when it was known both as ‘Fulham Bridge’ and ‘Putney Bridge’. This bridge was replaced by the present one in 1886. It was designed by Sir Joseph Bazalgette (1819-1891). It was widened in 1933.

Writing in 1876, James Thorne described Fulham as follows:

“The line of houses is now virtually unbroken from London, and Fulham has become a portion of the outer fringe of the great city. But the village proper, Old Fulham, retains something of its ancient and independent aspect … The High Street has much the appearance of a dull little country town … Much has been done during the last few years, and with marked success, to denude Fulham of its distinctive and picturesque features but it still preserves more of its special character than any other of the river-side villages within the metropolitan circle.”

I am sure that Thorne would have written the last sentence, quoted above, had he visited Fulham today. One place that existed when he was writing still exists. It is The Eight Bells Pub (near Putney Bridge station), which
existed in 1851, if not before. It might have been established as early as the 17th century. Nearby, on the corner of Fulham High Street and Ranelagh Gardens, there is a wonderful shop selling used books. It is literally cram full of books from floor to ceiling.

Apart from the bridge, the Bishops Palace, and the parks nearby, the other sight of interest in Fulham is its parish church of All Saints. The first record of a church on its site was mentioned in a document dated 1154. The only remaining part of the mediaeval church constructed in the 15th century is the tower, which was constructed in about 1440. The rest of what you see today was designed by Arthur Blomfield (1829-1899) and constructed in the early 1880s. Pevsner describes Blomfield’s Victorian gothic creation as:

“… a faithful if dull imitation of a generously scaled late Perpendicular church …”

The church was rebuilt because the old one was too small and liable to flooding. Blomfield’s edifice was built three feet higher than the old one to avoid flooding.

Inside the church, there are gravestones and other memorials that predate Blomfield’s rebuilding of it. In the south aisle, there is what looks like a very old carved stone baptismal font on a much more recent wooden stand.

The church is just over 450 yards away from the remains of Fulham Palace, which can be reached by walking through the pleasant riverside Bishops Park that runs from the Fulham end of Putney Bridge to the palace. As you walk through the park, you can watch crews of oarsmen rowing on the river. The famous annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race usually starts near Putney Bridge and ends at Mortlake near Chiswick Bridge. In 2021, it was temporarily relocated to the River Great Ouse in Cambridgeshire because of the ongoing covid19 pandemic.

The Bishops of London have held the Manor of Fulham since 704. They began residing on the site of Fulham Palace by the 11th century or before. The palace is within a former moat, which was about one mile long, but filled in during the early 1920s. The moat might have been dug even before
the Saxons arrived in England. The palace was one of several country seats of the Bishops of London until the 18th century when it became their principal residence. They used the palace as such until 1973, when they left it because of the high costs of running it. Since then, it has been cared for by a trust in collaboration with Hammersmith Council (now part of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham), which obtained the lease for the palace in 1975.

The oldest existing parts of the palace are the 15th century great hall and the Tudor courtyard. It and the rest of the main buildings of the palace are arranged around two main courtyards. One of these is surrounded by buildings constructed mainly in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. The other (smaller) courtyard is enclosed by buildings constructed during various times in the 18th century. A chapel, whose walls are lined with frescos depicting religious scenes, was built in 1858. It was the fourth chapel to have been built within the palace. It was designed by William Butterfield (1814-1900) and repaired after bomb damage inflicted during WW2.

The grounds of the palace are of interest as they include one of the earliest botanical gardens in the London area. They were established in the 16th century and by the 17th century, they contained many exotic species. A leading light in the development of the palace gardens and their interesting plants was Henry Compton (1632-1713), who was Bishop of London from 1675 to 1713. Compton was virulently anti-Catholic. An archaeologist connected with Fulham Palace noted:

“The Glorious Revolution followed in 1688 as James fled to France and was replaced by William III, a change which Compton rather unsurprisingly supported vociferously and was actively involved in. The end result was that for over a century Catholics could not vote, sit in parliament, take a commission in the army or marry a monarch (a law only repealed in 2015). Compton remained Bishop of London. If it wasn’t for his botanical influence would we be so supportive of such a religious bigot?”
During a recent visit to the lovely walled garden, I learned that during Compton’s time, the Bishops of London were responsible for the religious supervision of the colonists in Britain’s North American colonies. To look after their spiritual needs, Compton sent the Reverend Bannister out to Virginia in 1678. The latter was not only a cleric but also a keen botanist. Part of his mission to America was to collect plant specimens and send them back to Compton. The guidebook I bought at the palace quotes ‘Faulkner’ as noting that Compton collected:

“… a greater variety of exotic hardy trees then than had been seen in any garden in England.”

Over the centuries, much of what Compton grew has been lost and replaced by newer plants, but currently there is much work being done to recreate what Compton achieved back in the 38 years that he was bishop. A gardener assured me that all of the plants in the recently planted ‘Compton beds’ along the outside of the walled garden were species that the botanical bishop would have received from North America.

It is curious that many people, including me, are far more aware of other botanic gardens in London, including The Chelsea Physic Garden and Kew Gardens, than of this historic, visitable garden in Fulham. Fulham Palace is open to the public free of charge and provides a welcome oasis of beauty and historical interest in the mainly unremarkable suburbia that is now Fulham.

Next, we move away from the Thames to Notting Hill Gate and Notting Hill.
NOTTING HILL AND NOTTING HILL GATE

A LOST TOLL GATE

Notting Hill Gate is a stretch of roadway, 670 yards long. It runs west from Bayswater Road to Holland Park Avenue. It is part of what was once a Roman road that ran from London, passing through what is now Staines, to places west and southwest of the city. The ‘gate’ in the street name refers to a tollgate that stood along it until about 1860. The gates of this barrier were placed so that there was no way of bypassing them via the few side roads that existed prior to the development of the area during the 19th century.

I have no idea of how much was charged at this turnpike, but one might get a rough idea from a list of charges levied in early 18th century Wiltshire: "1s. for a coach or wagon, 6d. for a cart, 1d. for a ridden or led horse, 10d. a score for cattle, and 5d. a score for sheep.”

I was curious to learn where exactly the Notting Hill tollgate was located. I found an answer in a book that I bought whilst browsing the shelves of a local charity shop. According to Florence Gladstone and Ashley Barker, authors of “Notting Hill in bygone days” (published in 1924), a detailed history of the area, the tollgate known as ‘Notting Hill Gate’: “… was the first of three successive turnpikes at this spot and crossed the road east of the site of the Metropolitan Station. It seems possible that the toll-keeper’s house occupied the corner where that station is set back from the road. The very interesting view of this gate by Paul Sandby, R.A., dated 1793 … faces west and apparently shows the end of Portobello Lane and the Coach and Horses Inn.”
This gives a clear description of where the turnpike (tollgate) was located, but today, the appearance of the area described has changed considerably. To begin, Portobello Lane no longer exists, at least not with that name. It most likely followed the course of the present Portobello Road and connected with Notting Hill Gate along the southern stretch of what is now Pembridge Road. On a map surveyed in 1863-65, Portobello Road is marked in its present position but the northern stretch of it that led through what were then open fields to Portobello Farm was then still called ‘Portobello Lane’.

Today, the Underground station, formerly the ‘Metropolitan Station’, is not visible on the road as it can only be accessed by staircases leading down from the pavements to a subterranean ticket hall. The platforms of the Circle and District Lines are housed in what was part of the original station, which is set back from the road. These platforms were opened in 1868 and were accessed through a building set back from the south side of road as can be seen on an extremely detailed (1:1056) map surveyed in 1895.

During the 18th century, The Coach and Horses Inn stood at number 108 Notting Hill Gate, a few feet west of Pembridge Road (formerly ‘Portobello Lane’), where today a recently opened branch of Marks and Spencer is doing good business.

The tollgate disappeared long ago, and so did much of Notting Hill Gate that would have been recognisable to the two authors of the book mentioned above. The most prominent survivor of pre-WW2 days is the Coronet, currently the home of the Print Room theatre organisation. Near it but clothed in a dull, modern (1960s) exterior is The Gate Cinema, whose well-conserved auditorium was constructed in 1911 within a building that had been a restaurant since 1861. Most of the rest of the architecture lining Notting Hill Gate is mostly 20th century and/or aesthetically unpleasing. One exception is the former Czechoslovak Centre, now the Czech and Slovak embassies. This brutalist edifice was built between 1965 and 1970 to the designs of Jan Bočan, Jan Šrámek and Karel Štěpánský.
I am not sure that the buildings that used to stand in Notting Hill Gate were necessarily much better aesthetically than those today, but we can get an idea from a short stretch of pre-1945 buildings, currently numbered 26 to 70, opposite the northern end of Church Street. These are mostly shops, whose ground floors stretch away from the road to join buildings with two or three storeys set back from the road. Judging by the architecture of the buildings above and behind these shops, they were probably already built by the end of the 19th century. A drawing created in 1912 by William Cleverley Alexander (1840-1916), who resided near Notting Hill Gate, shows some of these buildings looking remarkably like how they appear today. However, since he created his picture, the row of buildings has been changed by the construction of two banks, each with their own neo-classical façades.

While I would not recommend visiting Notting Hill Gate for its own sake, it is the gateway to far more attractive sights such as Portobello Road, Kensington Gardens, Holland Park, and Notting Hill (of movie fame). And if you are thirsty, there are at least nine cafés within a paper cup’s throw away from the Underground station, and the number continues to increase.

_No visit to west London would be complete without a walk along Notting Hill’s Portobello Road. This is not only my opinion but that of many tourists from all over the world. However, what they see today is a marked change from what this thoroughfare used to be._
Lovers of street markets, whether they be searching for antiques, bric-a-brac, jewellery, telephone covers, clothing, snacks, cafés, flowers, fruit, or vegetables, will enjoy browsing the diverse stalls and small shops that line Portobello Road. This street, which used to be called ‘Portobello Lane’ runs from Notting Hill Gate to just south of the main railway line that begins at Paddington Station. In days gone by, it ran from the gravel pits at Notting Hill Gate to the now long-since demolished Portobello Farm, which stood roughly between Orchard Close and Blagrove Road in North Kensington.

Before the mid-19th century Portobello Lane, as it was then called, was to quote the historians Florence Gladstone and Ashley Barker (writing in 1924):

‘… one of the most rural and pleasant walks in the summer in the vicinity of London’, and within living memory it led ‘through fields to Kensal Green … cornfields and meadow land on each side …’

Well, Portobello Road is no longer bucolic. It is lined with buildings along its entire length. Currently, it begins with a short section that leads off Pembridge Villas. It is here that you can stop for a drink at the Sun in Splendour pub, which was built in the early 1850s. After running a few yards westwards, Portobello Road heads off in a north-westerly direction, which it maintains with barely any deviation for the rest of its length. Number 22 was the first London home of the writer George Orwell. He lived there as a lodger in the winter of 1927.

After crossing Chepstow Villas, the road slopes downwards and soon after this the market area commences. On most weekdays, much of the market is dedicated to daily domestic needs, mostly food. On Fridays and Saturdays, the number of stalls and the variety of goods on offer increases dramatically. In normal times (i.e., when there is no pandemic), Portobello
Road is choked with crowds of people from all over the world, especially on Saturdays.

In the 1860s, the Metropolitan Line (now the ‘Hammersmith and City Line’) was built. It crosses Portobello Road close to the Ladbroke Road station, which was originally known as ‘Notting Hill’ station. Rail access probably accounted for the urban development of what was once ‘Portobello Lane’. The market in Portobello Road probably began operating in the second half of the 19th century. Until the 1940s, it served people’s daily needs. Then, in the 1940s, traders selling anything from junk to antiques began trading along the road, alongside the purveyors of daily requirements, and that has how it has remained.

The architecture of Portobello Road is far from distinguished. Much of it is ‘bog standard’ Victorian suburban sprawl, but this is hardly disturbing as the eye has plenty of other things to distract it along the multicultural, bustling, colourful, sometimes quirky market street. Next, I will point out several things worth noticing if you can take your eyes off the shops, the buskers, and the stalls in the market.

The Electric Cinema on Portobello Road was first opened in 1910, making it one of the oldest still working cinemas in the UK. It was one of the first buildings in the area to receive a supply of electricity. It has an Edwardian façade. Despite having been closed for several short periods during its lifetime, it still shows films. Since its extensive repairs in 2000, it has become a luxurious space in which to watch films. It is near to Talbot Road that leads to the church of All Saints.

The Victorian church was built between 1852 and 1861 to the designs of the architects William White (1825-1900) and George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878). Heavily damaged during WW2, it was restored in 1951. Interesting and as attractive as is the church, of far greater interest is a carved small stone monument in the yard next to its north side.
The stone commemorates John Michell (1933-2009), who is described on the monument as “writer, geometer, natural philosopher”. He was educated at Eton and Trinity College Cambridge, where studied languages but missed examinations by oversleeping; trained as a Russian interpreter for the Royal Navy; painted and exhibited his works; and worked briefly as an estate agent and chartered surveyor. In 1966, by which time he had moved into one of the properties he managed in Notting Hill, its basement became the London Free School, an alternative community action education project. Around this time, Michell began publishing works on unidentified flying objects (‘UFOs’) and many other unexplained phenomena. His first book, “The Flying Saucer Vision”, published in 1967, was probably (to quote Wikipedia):

“… "the catalyst and helmsman" for the growing interest in UFOs among the hippie sector of the counter-culture.”

This work introduced links between UFOs and ley lines, proposed by Alfred Watkins, (1855-1935), which some believe criss-cross the countryside and act as markers for extra-terrestrial spacecraft crewed by aliens who assisted human society early in the history of mankind. Along with two subsequent books, notably his “The View over Atlantis”, and other publications, Michell became an influential figure who believed in the:

“‘sacred geometry’ of the Great Pyramid. Alfred Watkins's ‘The Old Straight Track’ had come up with the concept of ley lines in 1925. John took it much further, believing that these alignments of traditional sites were a kind of feng shui of the landscape. They made up a sort of Druids' transport system, he said, which harnessed a mysterious power that whisked large rocks across the countryside”, (quoting an obituary in “The Guardian”).

Michell led an extraordinary life. He felt it necessary to question orthodoxy. His book on the identity of the true author(s) of Shakespeare’s plays, “Who Wrote Shakespeare?” examined this question thoroughly but received mixed reviews. Several of his other publications questioned the commonly accepted archaeologists’ interpretations of their findings, suggesting that their refusal to take ideas about ley lines seriously was a grave error. In the 1980s, two academic archaeologists investigated his ideas and found that he had erroneously included natural rocks and monuments that were created far later than during the prehistoric era as markers for his supposed ley lines. When the replacement of feet and
inches by the Metric metre was introduced, Michell objected strongly to the abandonment of a measurement that he believed dated back to earliest times and established an Anti-Metrication Board to oppose the change. His monument outside the church was sculpted by John de Pauley. It is shaped like an icosahedron.

Returning to Portobello Road, we walk northwards passing numerous pubs, cafés, restaurants, as well as shops and a branch of the Tesco supermarket chain, before passing under the Hammersmith and City Line and the Westway bridges. While beneath these crossing, you can see a mosaic dedicated to the memory of the Spanish Civil War. North of the bridges, the market peters out except of Fridays and Saturdays. Soon we reach the forbidding-looking mainly brick Vicente Cañada Blanch Spanish School, which is separated from Portobello Road by a brick wall. This is housed in a former Dominican convent, which was built in 1862.

North of this, Portobello Road crosses Goldborne Road. This picturesque thoroughfare, a centre of the Moroccan community leads to Meanwhile Gardens and the Paddington Branch of the Grand Union Canal, both of which I describe elsewhere in this volume. While in Golborne Road, I recommend stopping at the Lisboa café, which sells a wide selection of Portuguese snacks including croquettes made from salt cod and pasteis de nata (custard tarts).

A walk along Portobello Road is rewarding not so much for its architectural attractions but for its life enhancing effect. It is best to avoid it on Saturdays, when the crowds mar enjoyment of what once used to be a pleasant country lane. Having said that, if it is an exciting ‘buzz’ that you are seeking, then Saturdays are when you will experience it.
Most people walk around either looking at their mobile ‘phones or, more sensibly, looking around them. Fewer people glance down at their feet and examine what they are stepping on. I am one of that minority. The pavements of Notting Hill have a variety of circular metal covers protecting the entrances to coal cellars in basements beneath the paving stones. By looking at these, I discovered that once Notting Hill Gate used to have some manufacturing industrial ventures not associated with food and drink.

**STEPPING ON THE PAST**

Industrial activity is not what springs to mind when looking at Notting Hill Gate district today. About the only things that are made on a large scale in the ‘Gate’ are food and drink. Yet, walking along the pavements in the area, you can see evidence that once upon a time the area was not devoid of industry. This is evident by examining the circular cast-iron coalhole covers that you might step on. These metal discs, which are almost flush with the pavement, could be removed to provide an orifice through which coal could be supplied to the coal cellars beneath the pavement. Using these holes, the coal deliverers, usually covered with coal dust, could avoid entering the house. Many stretches of pavement have been re-paved, omitting the covers, because many of the former coal cellars have been converted to usable living space. The covers that remain – and there are still plenty of them – are often covered with patterns in bas-relief and usually bear the names and locations of the companies that manufactured them.

I was intrigued by one company, which made many of the covers in Notting Hill Gate, ‘RH & J Pearsons’ whose covers bear the words “Automatic Action” and the information that company was in Notting Hill Gate. I wondered where their factory was in an area, which is no longer associated with trades such as casting iron coalhole covers. I thought that there would be little information about this, but I was wrong. I shall try to condense some of the sea of informative material about these metal discs, over which we walk often without noticing them.
The company ‘Robert Henry and Jonathan Pearson’, which operated between the 1840s and 1940, was located at the following places at various times:

“Nos. 141 and 143, High-street, Notting-hill, Middlesex (1871) ...and 91, 95, and 97 Camden Hill Road; Iron, Steel & Metal Warehouses, 21, 22, & 23 Upper Uxbridge St.; Manufactory & Workshops, 14, Durham Place, Notting Hill Gate, W. (1879) 141, 143, 145, High Street, Notting Hill Gate, London, W. (1901)”

All these addresses are in Notting Hill Gate.

In addition to coalhole covers, the company, which described itself as ‘manufacturing and retail ironmongers’, produced a wide range of ironmongery for domestic use including, for example, kitchen ranges, grates, fireplaces, railings, gates. They also produced electrical fittings (for lighting and cooking) and gas fittings. In addition, they supplied a wide selection of plumbing material and sanitary appliances.

Robert Pearson lived between about 1821 and 1893. His brother Jonathan lived between about 1831 and 1898. Both died in Newcastle-on-Tyne, where they were born. Their father, William, was a hardware manufacturer. According to the 1861 England Census, both brothers were living in Kensington. The 1871 Census entry for Robert reveals a little about the size of the firm:

“Ironmonger, Senior Partner in the firm of R. H. & J. Pearson ... employing 66 men.”

So, Pearson’s was a large local business.

A document published by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea gives an insight to the manufacturing of coalhole covers (‘plates’):

“Skilled artisans were employed to design and carve wooden patterns of the required shape and size. From these an endless number of moulds were produced by ramming sand around them in a box called a flask. The pattern was then removed and molten metal was poured into the cavity. Sadly many examples of Victorian cast iron work has disappeared with the exception of street furniture, in particular coal plates.”

Of Pearson’s, the document adds:

“R H & J Pearson and Sons in Notting Hill Gate was one of the largest wholesale and retail ironmongers in the area and their name appears on countless plates. Robert Henry Pearson established his business in the 1840s and by the year of his death in 1893, 200 people were employed by the firm.”
One other bit of information about Pearson’s relates to one of its employees, John Henry Mills (1880-1942), who was born in Notting Hill Gate. On the 11th of November 1895, he was ‘bound’ to Pearson’s to serve an apprenticeship for five years. By late January 1899, he had already run away and enrolled with 5th Rifle Brigade (London). For committing some now unknown felony, John was discharged on the 21st of March 1899. Soon after this the Second Anglo-Boer War broke out in South Africa. John served with the Imperial Yeomanry during this conflict. After the war, his movements are unknown, but he is known to have served in WW1. After marrying in 1918, he and his wife lived in London, where by 1939, he was recorded on an official register as a “housekeeper”. Clearly, ironmongery had little appeal for young Mills.

Pearson’s made many of the coalhole covers in Notting Hill Gate, but by no means all of them. It is worth glancing occasionally at the pavement to see the variety of coalhole covers still in existence. It appears that some of these once mundane items are stolen, to be sold to collectors. Some of the stolen covers have been replaced by artistic modern covers. A good example is one with poetry on it near The Gate Cinema. Now redundant because coal is hardly used for domestic purposes in London, these metal discs are remnants of an era now fading ever further into history.
The name Notting Hill might be derived from a Saxon family, the Cnottingas, or “sons of Cnotta”, who may have made a clearing for themselves in the dense woodlands to the north of the old Roman road leading out of London towards what is now Uxbridge.

The historian Florence Gladstone noted:
“Other writers have thought that the encampment was founded by followers of King Knut. Whether Saxon or Danish in its origin the little colony seems to have been entirely wiped out before the Norman Conquest; nothing but the name remaining to testify to its former existence. The popular belief that Notting Hill owes its name to the nut bushes which grew upon its slopes is a pleasant, but untenable, tradition. The name occurs in the Patent Rolls for A.D. 1361. There it is “Knottynghull,” proving that the ‘k’ is original as is also the double ‘t.’”

Whatever its origins, what I will describe in the next section relates to more recent times and concentrates on something, now no longer in existence, that might be unknown to many people who visit, or live in, Notting Hill and Notting Hill Gate and the popular street market along Portobello Road.

A TRAGEDY, A RACECOURSE, AND A REPUBLIC: NOTTING HILL

This section is largely based on a walk that I made on the afternoon of the 13th of June 2017, when I strolled right past the 24-storey Grenfell Tower housing block. That night, it was to become engulfed in flames. More than 70 of its residents lost their lives. I dedicate what follows to the memory of all those people who perished, or otherwise suffered, because of this horrendously tragic disaster.
In the mid-eighteenth century, Richard Ladbroke (brother of the banker Robert Ladbroke) of Tadworth in Surrey acquired a huge plot of land, countryside, in Kensington. After Richard, who was extremely wealthy, died, the so-called ‘Ladbroke Estate’ passed into the hands of James Weller Ladbroke. The latter kept the estate until his death in 1847. During the several decades that James owned the land, there was much building-work done on it, making the estate (a large part of Notting Hill) much as it is today. It was during his ownership of the land that the short-lived Hippodrome racecourse was laid out on an a then undeveloped part of his estate.

Before 1836, the nearest horse-racing course to London was at Epsom Downs, where races had been held since 1661, or maybe even earlier. Epsom is about twenty miles from Trafalgar Square, several hours by horse and carriage. In 1836, Mr John Whyte took a twenty-one-year lease on at least 140 acres of the then undeveloped part of the Ladbroke Estate. He built a racecourse, the ‘Hippodrome’, which was far more easily accessible than Epsom to all Londoners. One problem that Whyte encountered, and it gave rise to a lot of trouble, was that a public footpath ran across his course, which, understandably, he wanted to surround by a fence. This trouble arose in the potteries and their surrounding slums, which were to the immediate west of the racecourse.

Despite this problem, racing began at the Hippodrome in June 1837. Because of continuing agitation by local protesters, a considerable police presence was required at race-meetings. At one point, in 1838, Whyte considered building a subway beneath his course to get around the footpath problem. In May 1842, after only thirteen race-meetings in five years, Whyte admitted failure, and relinquished the lease.

For a short while, the racecourse reverted to being countryside, and then James Weller Ladbroke allowed building on it to commence.
In what follows, we shall stroll on the area around and upon the land, which was once the Hippodrome. To do this, it is necessary to know where the racecourse was. Several detailed maps contemporary with the Hippodrome exist but they were drawn long before the present road layout existed. Superimposing the old maps with current ones is not easy, but it can provide a rough idea of where the former racecourse lay. However, given that almost all the landmarks drawn on the old maps have disappeared, some intelligent guesswork is required. In the description of my walk around the area, I will point out the possible (but not by any means certain) sites of places associated with the old Hippodrome. Let us begin near Holland Park Avenue, which was never part of the racecourse. This tree-lined thoroughfare, a part of the old West Road running between London and Oxford, was developed in the nineteenth century. Lined with mature shady trees, this avenue runs alongside many fine dwellings.

Holland Park Station on the Central Line is housed in an attractive low building on Holland Park Avenue. It opened in 1900 and was one of several Central Line stations designed by Harry Bell Measures (1862-1940). The tops of the pilasters between the windows on the north side of the station are decorated with gargoyles sculpted faces. Almost opposite this side of the building, there is a tall building with distinctive chimneys. This is Lansdowne House on Lansdowne Road. The house was designed by architect William Flockhart (1852-1913) and built for the Australian millionaire Sir Edmund Davis (1861-1939), who lived at 9 Lansdowne Road. He was a mining financier and an art enthusiast. He built Lansdowne House, which contains six flats with two-storey artists’ studios and other amenities. They attracted up-and-coming artists, a few of whom are named on the blue plaque attached to the building: Charles Ricketts (1866-1931); Charles Shannon (1863-1937); Glyn Philpot (1863-1937); Vivian Forbes (1891-1937); James Pryde (1866-1941); and F. Cayley Robinson (1862-1927). None of their names mean anything to me.

A statue of the Ukrainian Saint Volodmyr (c958-1015) stands outside the Hotel Ravna Gora on the corner of Holland Park Avenue and a road named Holland Park. There are several places named ‘Ravna Gora’ in the former Yugoslavia and at least one in Bulgaria. Getting back to Volodmyr, he ruled the Ukraine as king between 980 and 1015 AD. His statue was put up in 1988 to celebrate St Volodmyr’s establishment of Christianity in the Ukraine in 988 AD. It was sculpted by the Ukrainian-born Leonid Molodoshanin (1915-2009).
Further up the hill, we reach the home of the late Anthony (‘Tony’) Benn (1925-2014) and his wife Caroline (née De Camp; 1926-2000). With its front door painted appropriately in red, this is where two active, intelligent socialists lived their last years. It is worth noting in passing that these leaders of the left in the UK lived in a valuable home in an extremely prosperous part of London. Almost opposite, but a little way uphill, is the house where the artist James McBey (1883-1959) lived in the 1930s. Its large studio windows face north to catch what many artists believe to be the best light for working.

Notting Hill Gate at the top end of Holland Park Avenue is dominated by a residential tower block, Campden Hill Towers. This unattractive building is, and has always been, privately owned, despite it looking as if it might once have been social housing. It was erected in the early 1960s, or, maybe, late 1950s. I remember visiting a schoolfriend who lived there sometime before 1965. Little did I know it then, but my future wife and her family were also living in that block at the time. Then, during my visit, I was particularly impressed that he lived in a two-storey apartment high above the ground. It was the first time I had ever seen a ‘duplex’ flat. The building is not the only eyesore in Notting Hill Gate. It competes in ugliness with nearby Newcombe House.

Just west of the Towers, there is a lovely mural in a narrow alleyway. This was painted by Barney McMahon in 1997. The alleyway ran alongside Marks and Spencer’s food store, which was once the building that housed Damien Hirst’s original (in all senses of the word) Pharmacy Restaurant (now re-created and updated at the Newport Street Gallery, near Lambeth Palace). In 2020, the building was demolished, but both the alleyway and the mural remain.
Fortunately, the area has at least one lovely building, the former ‘Coronet Cinema’. This was designed as a theatre by WGR Sprague (1863-1933) who designed many of London’s theatres. It opened in 1908. By 1923, the Coronet had become a cinema, and remained so for many years. Apart from the screen, the fittings inside the auditorium were those of an unmodernised Edwardian theatre. Until smoking was banned in all public places, the Coronet was one of the last cinemas in London which permitted smoking (but only in the balcony seating). Between 2004 and 2014, the Coronet doubled up as both a branch of the Kensington Temple Church and, also, as a cinema. And, in 2015 the Coronet reverted to being used as a theatre, now called ‘The Print Room’. This sensitively restored theatre puts on interesting plays, which are well-produced. The bar, which is located beneath the stage in what was once the stalls area of the cinema, is worth visiting to see its ever changing, tastefully quirky décor. In 2020, the theatre was redecorated and a statue by the British sculptor Gavin Turk (born 1967) has been placed upon the dome above the building’s main entrance. The new artwork replaces one that was removed many decades ago.

Close to the Coronet, encased in an ugly modern building, is The Gate Cinema. Its beautiful old auditorium was converted in 1911 from a former Italian restaurant, which had been designed in 1861 by William Hancock. The foyer and the offices built over the cinema were built in 1962 by the architects Douton and Hurst. Lovely as the cinema is, it suffers from there being hardly any raking of the rows of the audience’s seating.

*By now, you may be wondering what happened to the Hippodrome, which I promised you earlier on. Your patience is about to be rewarded.*
The popular Prince Albert pub on Pembridge Road, near where Kensington Park Road begins, has a small ‘alternative’ theatre, ‘The Gate’, on its first floor. The early 19th century pub and its former brewery stood close to the beginning of a long footpath or track that led to the public entrance of the Hippodrome. This and the pub are recorded on maps drawn while the racecourse was still in existence. A green-painted wooden ‘cabmen’s shelter’, now used as a café, stands in the middle of Kensington Park Road close to the Prince Albert. This shelter is believed to be located close to the spot where the path to the Hippodrome’s public entrance began. The path would have run in a northwest direction towards the course’s entrance.

Directly opposite the cabmen’s shelter, there is the Kensington Temple. This is a Pentecostal church, which was built originally as the ‘Horbury Chapel’ in 1849. During elections, it becomes our local polling station. Its neighbour on Ladbroke Grove is the former Mercury Theatre (building erected in 1851). This was opened in 1933 by Ashley Dukes (1885-1959), who was deeply involved in theatre. The theatre, which put on plays until 1956, was also used by Duke’s wife the Polish-born ballet dancer and teacher Marie Rambert (1888-1982). It was the birthplace and home (until 1987) of her world-famous Ballet Rambert.

Kensington Park Road, which did not exist at the time of the Hippodrome, leads past Ladbroke Square with its huge private garden to the ochre-coloured neo-classical St Peters Church designed by Thomas Allom (1804-1872). It was built 1855-57 when much of the Ladbroke Estate had been covered with houses. The church stands opposite the short Stanley Gardens. The public entrance to the Hippodrome is believed to have been close to where Stanley Gardens meets Stanley Crescent.
Ladbroke Grove, just west of Stanley Crescent, crosses much of what would have been the eastern part of the Hippodrome. The Grove rises from Holland Park Avenue to a summit close to St Johns Church, which was built on Hippodrome land in 1845, very soon after the racecourse closed. It was designed in a gothic style by John Hargreaves Stevens and George Alexander. It is widely believed that the hill upon which this church perches was the public grandstand from which the entire racecourse could be seen from above. Far below it, and on the far side of the course, roughly where Clarendon Road runs today, there was “… an enclosure for carriages of the Royal Family”. This is marked on an 1841 map of the Hippodrome. This map, published in the “Sporting Review” of 1841, shows the Hippodrome as having a common starting and finishing track that ran in a north-south direction, and three parallel loops that ran off it at its northern end to produce tracks varying in length from one to two miles.

It has been suggested to me that at least one of these loops (it would have to be the one-mile loop) ran where the curved section of Lansdowne Road runs today. I cannot comment on the accuracy of this. The 1841 map shows a ‘Road to Stables’ leading from Holland Park Avenue into what is now either Pottery Lane or its close parallel, Portland Road. ‘Hippodrome Stables’ is also marked between these two lanes on an 1860 map. This is close to the spots marked on the 1841 map as ‘Judges Stand’, ‘Saddling Paddock and Stables’, and ‘Starting Post’.

Lansdowne Rise descends from the hill, where spectators used to stand, towards Clarendon Road. It passes across a private garden named ‘Montpelier Garden’, which is growing on land that might well have been a part of a long straight stretch of the racecourse. The 1860 map marks the Rise as being then called ‘Montpelier Road’. A red brick building on the short Clarendon Cross bears the name ‘Clarendon Works’. This was a Victorian brick-making factory. It has been tastefully converted into luxury apartments. Its location is not accidental, as you will soon discover. Clarendon Cross leads to a pleasant little intersection shaded by trees and surrounded by a few shops.

The continuation of Clarendon Cross is the short Hippodrome Place. On the 1860 map, it was marked as “Clarendon Place”, but by 1900 it had acquired its present name. It is near to Hippodrome Mews, which apart from its name and being close to the site of the former Hippodrome but outside its bounds, displays no evidence of having been part of the Hippodrome.
Pottery Lane gets its name from the fact that it led to the potteries that ran alongside the western edge of the Hippodrome. There are two buildings of interest in the lane. One is the former ‘Earl of Zetland’ pub, which served drinkers between 1849 and 2009. It has now been converted for other purposes. Across the road from it is the Roman Catholic St Francis of Assisi Church. In the 1840s and the 1850s, the Roman Catholic population of west London increased greatly. This church was built in 1860 to address their spiritual needs. During the second half of the nineteenth century and before, this part of Notting Hill, close to the potteries (and some piggeries) and known as ‘Notting Dale’, was impoverished and the haunt of many people involved in unlawful activities. It was people from this area, who tried disrupting races on the Hippodrome because of the disputed footpath crossing it (see above). The church’s interesting website relates: “During this period the ‘West London News’ reported that “If the church of St. Francis be of gloomy aspect, it certainly throws a gleam – a ray of hope – on the outside moral darkness in the midst of which it is situated.”

Although the outside of the neo-gothic church is not eye-catching, it is worth entering its peaceful small courtyard and the church’s far from gloomy interior.

Apart from a road name, nothing remains of the potteries and brickfields in the area except one solitary kiln on Walmer Road. A plaque attached to it describes it as a ‘bottle kiln’. Used for baking bricks, it is shaped like the neck and top of a wine bottle. Although very few of these exist in London, another one can be seen at the Fulham Pottery next to Putney Bridge Underground Station.
Avondale Park can be entered opposite the kiln. The Park was created in the 1890s on the site that had formerly been a fetid pool, an area filled with slurries from the nearby piggeries and Adams’ Brickfields. The Adams family, who leased the land for their brickfields, also leased the 140-acre Portobello Farm located at the northern end of the present Portobello Road roughly south of Golborne Road. Incidentally, the name ‘Portobello’ commemorates Admiral Vernon’s victory over the Spanish in 1739 at the Battle of Porto Belo in Central America. It is ironic that today many Spanish people live in the Portobello area. Many of them are members of the families of anti-fascist Spaniards who escaped from General Franco’s Spain. A monument to the Spanish Civil war in the form of a mural made in mosaic can be seen on Portobello Road under the Westway overhead bridge. On Fridays and Saturdays, this mural overlooks a large number of market stalls selling antiques and various other items.
The pleasant Avondale Park contains a series of circular, wood-clad buildings that look like inverted cones, and are linked together by a lovely curved, flat roof. These round structures, which comprise a ‘pavilion’, contain lavatories and storage rooms. They were designed by Mangera Yvars Architects in 2010, and then built shortly afterwards.

In 2009, gardeners working on the deep roots of a tree stumbled across a long-forgotten WW2 bunker under the park. It would have been able to accommodate about 200 people, but few locals remember its existence. The well-constructed, steel-lined shelter was constructed in 1939 and sealed up in 1946. It contained furniture, electric lighting, and toilets.

Walmer Road leads north to the beautiful new Kensington Leisure Centre on the east side of Lancaster Green. This building, which is covered externally with multiple, parallel, slender, vertical concrete slabs was opened in 2015, is pleasing to the eye. It was designed by LA Architects (of East Sussex). Close to the buildings in the grassy Lancaster Green, there is an old piece of masonry, a foundation stone for a former Kensington ‘Public Baths and Wash-Houses’ that was laid in 1886. These baths used to stand close to the newly built centre.

Near to the Leisure Centre, stands another new, colourful building, a school: the Kensington Aldridge Academy. This is a coeducational state secondary school sponsored by the Aldridge Foundation. It has been in existence since 2014. Its building was designed by London-based Studio E Architects. Close to this, stands Notting Hill Methodist Church. Its single slender tower recalls the appearance of minarets. It was built between 1878 and 1879.
The church, the Academy, and the Leisure Centre, all stand in the shadow of Grenfell Tower, (formerly) a twenty-four-storey residential tower block erected between 1972 and 1974. When I was taking photographs of the Leisure Centre on the afternoon of Tuesday the 13th of June 2017, I barely noticed the block next to which I was standing. It was just another unexceptional tower block that I thought was not worthy of my attention. That night, it and many of its inhabitants were destroyed by fire that rapidly engulfed it. At least 70 perished in the inferno – maybe, we will never know the exact number of victims. It left hundreds of people homeless, bereft of all their material possessions, and mourning for their neighbours and loved ones. The cause of the conflagration and the resulting disaster might well be connected to its outer cladding panels, which should never have been fitted because they were known to be highly inflammable. For a long time, all that remains of the building was a blackened concrete skeleton. More recently, the top floors of the building have been removed and the charred structure has been enshrouded in pale coloured, opaque sheeting. I hope that none of the local schoolchildren I watched entering the Leisure Centre that fateful Tuesday afternoon became victims of the fire.

West of the disaster area, we reach Bramley Road. Just after it passes under the elevated Westway, one of Europe’s earliest elevated highways – a modern racetrack that crosses part of the former Hippodrome, we come across Walmer House. This ageing brick-built block of flats stands a little to the west of a now demolished Walmer House that used to stand on the western stretch of Walmer Road. The older Walmer House, the former Episcopal Palace of the Bishop of Norwich, is marked on a 1900 map as “Jews Deaf and Dumb Home”. This was founded in 1863 in Bloomsbury by Baroness Mayer de Rothschild. Its purpose was to teach deaf and dumb resident Jewish children to speak. The school moved to the Walmer House in Walmer Road in 1875, and then to Nightingale Lane (Balham) in 1899. It closed in 1965.

Just before Bramley Road becomes St Helen’s Gardens, there is a dilapidated house set back from the road next to Robinson House. It bears a crest with the letters, “W” or “H” and “R”, and the date 1894. According to Dave Walker, a historian at Kensington Central Library, this has been used as a garage and for light industrial purposes over the years since the beginning of the twentieth century. It stands just south of the probable southern boundary of the northern section of the long-gone Hippodrome racetrack.
St Helen’s Gardens rises gently in an almost northerly direction, crossing what was once the north-western section of the Hippodrome. Scampston Mews, which is close to the southern end of this road, is built on land that was part of the Hippodrome. The mews are not shown as existing on a detailed 1860 map, but they do appear on a 1900 map. The mainly gothic, brick St Helens Church at the top of St Helens Gardens was rebuilt in 1956 (architect: JS Sebastian Comper) on the site of an earlier church, built in 1884 and destroyed during WW2. It stands close to the former Notting Barn Farm, which shared its southern boundary with the northern boundary of the Hippodrome. The farm, which certainly existed in the 18th century and was close to Portobello Farm to its east, disappeared from maps, leaving no material trace, sometime in the 1880s.

Retracing our steps down St Helen’s Gardens and Bramley Road, we reach Latimer Road Underground Station. It opened in 1868. Oddly, it is nowhere near to Latimer Road. It is almost half a mile south of any road with that name. However, when it was built, it was much closer, as I will explain soon. While at the station, you should enter the nearby ‘Garden Bar and Café’, which is housed in a former pub, the ‘Station Hotel’, which has been in existence since the 1860s. The Café, which is owned by an Albanian friend of mine, serves excellent Mediterranean food, which may be eaten either inside or in a lovely, sheltered back garden.

A narrow lane, Lockton Street, connects Bramley Road with nearby Freston Road. On one side, Lockton Street is lined by railway arches, and on the other by newly built apartment blocks with attractive street entrance gates. Freston Road used to be called ‘Latimer Road’, and therefore the station near it was aptly named. Walking northwards along Freston Road, one cannot miss a large red brick neo-gothic building, which has housed ‘The Harrow Club’ since 1967. This used to be the Holy Trinity Church, which was built between 1887 and 1889 to the designs of R Norman Shaw (1831-1912), architect of the first ‘New Scotland Yard’. Further north on the eastern side of Freston Road, stands the former ‘Latymer Road School’, a massive brick building with roof gables. This was built in 1880 by the School Board. Now, it is used as a ‘pupil support centre’.
Just beyond the school, Freston Road ends and becomes a footpath that winds its way between public sporting facilities. Amongst the tennis courts and other parts of the Westway Fitness Centre, there is a row of four Eton Fives courts, such as we had at my (private) secondary school in Highgate. Originally an elitist game, the Centre is making attempts to popularise this sport, which very faintly resembles squash except that the ball is hit with gloved hands. The footpath then passes under the curving concrete bridges that carry the overhead roads which connect the Westway with the West Cross Route, which carries traffic south to the Shepherds Bush roundabout. Eventually, the path emerges north of Westway close to the former Latimer Arms Pub, which closed in the 1990s. It was already established by the early 1870s.

The beginning of Stable Way is near the former pub. It leads in a southerly direction, threading its way beneath the road bridges and between car repair workshops with many derelict vehicles. At its southern end is the Westway Traveller Site. This was built in 1976 to replace an unauthorised site that had been favoured mostly by Irish gypsies and ‘Travellers’ for centuries. Now, it is exclusively occupied by Irish Travellers. In 1981, the Travellers took Kensington and Chelsea Council to court to try to prove the unsuitability of the site, being as it is, surrounded by vehicles emitting noxious exhaust fumes. The Council won.

Retracing our steps, we return to Freston Road. Where this road meets Bramley Road at a sharp angle, stands the ‘Bramley Arms’, a former pub. This nineteenth century pub, which closed in the 1980s, was used as a location in the films “The Lavender Hill Mob” and “Quadrophenia”. It is now used for housing. Further down the road, we reach a large red brick building bearing large notices, one inset in the brickwork and another in colourful mosaic, that inform the viewer that this was once ‘The People’s Hall’. Opened in 1901, it assumed great significance in 1977 (see below). An entrance to it on Olaf Street gives access to the Frestonian Gallery, which displays contemporary art.

The name of the art gallery commemorates an extraordinary incident comparable to that portrayed in the 1949 film “Passport to Pimlico”, in which the Pimlico area of London declared independence. This happened for real in Freston Road in 1977. By this date, the area around Freston Road had deteriorated significantly, and the Greater London Council (‘GLC’) wanted to evacuate its inhabitants to redevelop it. As a local resident, Tony Sleep put it:
“The GLC decided that it was intolerable having 120 people living in these damp old dirty houses and it would be a much better idea to knock them all down and make us homeless…”

Under the leadership of Tony Albery and other social activists, it was decided that the 120 residents (many of them squatters who had moved into almost derelict buildings that had been neglected by the GLC prior to redeveloping the area) living in the 1.8-acre plot around Freston Road should declare the area a republic independent of the UK. The republic was named ‘Frestonia’, and its inhabitants, who all added the suffix ‘-Bramley’ to their own surnames, were called ‘Frestonians’. In addition to applying (without success) for membership of the United Nations, Frestonia issued its own postage stamps, and created a rubber stamp for marking visitors’ passports. The People’s Hall briefly became the National Film Theatre of Frestonia.

Frestonia attracted attention of the press both inside and outside the UK. The Republic staggered on for about five years. The actions of the Frestonians were not ignored by the GLC, who ultimately re-developed the area in such a way as not to overly disrupt the old community. The People’s Hall is the only tangible remnant of the short-lived republic.

The final stretch of this stroll begins on St Anns Road, which later becomes ‘St Anns Villas’. At the corner of this road and Wilsham Street, there is a terrace of flat-roofed buildings. Formerly known as ‘St Katherine’s Road’, Wilsham Street and others parallel to it led to the former potteries described above. This street appears on an 1860 map, made at a time when there were still brickfields a few streets north of it. Charles Booth’s late nineteenth century ‘poverty map’ shows that the western half of the street was “Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family”, whilst the eastern half, closest to the former potteries, was “Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.” Well, all of that has changed. While I cannot vouch for the behaviour of the present inhabitants, I can safely say that they are not poor.
St James Gardens, one street south of Wilsham Street, contains a rectangular garden in which the neo-gothic, Victorian St James Church (built 1845) stands. On Booth’s map, these streets, which neighbour a poor area, are marked as “Middle class. Well-to-do.” Here, as in so many parts of London, the rich live(d) cheek-by-jowl with the poor. The Holland Park Synagogue is also on St James Gardens. This was built and consecrated in 1928 inspired by the design of the much older Bevis Marks Synagogue. Its congregation, ‘Sha’ar Hashamayim Kneseth Sasson David’, named to honour David Sassoon, was founded by Sephardic Jews who arrived in London from the Ottoman Empire. The Tabernacle School neighbours the synagogue. The school is housed in a spectacular crenelated brick and white stone mock-Tudor building, similar to many of those that line St Anns Villas. A plaque on another similarly designed villa records that the music-hall comedian Albert Chevalier (1861-1923) lived there. Born Albert Onésime Britannicus Gwathweyd Louis Chevalier in the prosperous St Ann Villas, son of a French teacher, this child of the bourgeoisie specialised in cockney-related humour.

The present school and the other villas were built in the 1840s above the line of an improved sewer that was built in the late 1830s. This sewer follows the course of an older sewer, The Counter’s Creek Sewer’, which in turn followed the course of one of London’s ‘Lost Rivers’, Counters Creek, which used to flow from west of Kensal Green to the Thames, which it enters as ‘Chelsea Creek’. Counter’s Creek is marked on an 1841 map as running alongside the western edge of the northern part of the Hippodrome. Further south, it ran along what is now Freston Street before following a course approximately where St Anns Road and Villas run.

St James Gardens crosses St Anns Villas to become ‘Swanscombe Road’. A small Victorian building, now converted to housing, carries the name that commemorates its former use, the ‘Organ Factory’. Queensdale Road, which runs parallel to, and south of, Swanscombe Road, is the home of a Sikh temple, the ‘Central Gurdwara (Khalsa Jatha) London’. The Khalsa Jatha was founded in London in 1908 “…to promote religious and social activities among the Sikhs who had settled in the UK. Later in the same year it was affiliated to the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar”. Initially based in Putney, it then moved to Shepherds Bush, before reaching its present site in 1969.
At its southern end, St Ann Villas meets Royal Crescent, one of London’s rivals to the Regency crescents in Bath. Now slightly shabby in appearance, this crescent was laid out by Robert Cantwell (c. 1793-1859) in 1846. Cantwell was responsible for much of the building development on the Norland Estate, which includes the Crescent. Unlike the crescents in Bath, Royal Crescent is made up of two quarter circle terraces, separated by the end of a road, St Anns Villas. The terraces surround a beautifully laid out private garden, which can be seen easily from various places along its cast-iron fencing. In the middle of the Holland Park Avenue boundary of the gardens, there is a stone public drinking fountain (no longer working). This was paid for by a Miss Mary Cray Ratray of 41 Tavistock Square to perpetuate her memory. She died in 1875.

Just west of the Crescent, there is a wide, traffic-free street, almost a piazza, called ‘Norland Road’. This was developed in the 1840s, and as its name suggests it was part of the Norland Estate, its westernmost border. From its southern end, there is a fine view of the ‘Thames Water Ring Main Tower’, which was erected by Thames Water in 1994. Clad in a transparent material, this futuristic object in the middle of a busy roundabout, was designed by reForm Architects (London). Its purpose is to house a ‘surge pipe’ on London’s Thames Water Ring Main, which carries potable water from water treatment plants to the city’s inhabitants. It is here that I conclude my lengthy perambulation.

By trying to track down the few barely tangible memories of Notting Hill’s short-lived Hippodrome racecourse, I have seen many sights that bear testimony to the history of a fascinating part of west London. Notting Hill has had a diverse history: from its rustic origins to more recent events, including, most recently, the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower.

*This walk will leave you standing next to the busy Shepherds Bush roundabout with its transparent water tower. If you walk further west, you will reach Shepherds Bush, the subject of my next stroll.*
SHEPHERDS BUSH

OLIVER CROMWELL, SHEEP, AND SHEPHERDS

Now, we will look at an area of West London that lacks the charm of, say, Chelsea or Kensington, but is not without interest. However, it is not one of the places to which many tourists flock. In the 1870s, Shepherd Bush was a small village, built around a triangular green, Shepherds Bush Green (formerly ‘Common’), which was beginning to become engulfed by London’s relentless growth. “The place has little to interest anyone”, James Thorne wrote about Shepherds Bush (in his 1876 “Handbook to the Environs of London”). Many people erroneously share his opinion today. I will try to demonstrate that what Thorne wrote is now no longer true.

The name Shepherds Bush and variations of its spelling existed in the 17th century. It appears, for example, on a 1775 map, in the middle of open countryside, as ‘Sheperds Bush’. The name might either refer to a family name or to shepherding. A ‘shepherd’s bush’ is a bush from which a shepherd can shelter from the elements to watch his (or in the case of Little Bo Peep, her) flock. The place name might also refer to a place where shepherds rested their sheep on their weary way to Smithfield Market. I recently learnt that in the 18th century sheep from Wales, almost two hundred miles from London, would have been trotting across England to London for twenty days to reach Shepherds Bush. Whatever the name’s origin, you are unlikely to spot a sheep anywhere in the area except in one of the many mostly halal butchers’ shops close to the Green.

Until recently, Shepherds Bush Green was an uninviting triangular open space littered with drug-users’ syringes and needles. Between 2012 and 2013, the Green was re-developed, and has become a pleasant island of greenness surrounded by a seemingly unending stream of traffic. Shepherds Bush Station on the Central Line first opened in 1900. In 2008, coinciding with the opening of the nearby Westfield shopping centre, an attractive, airy modern station opened to replace an older one. The station gives access to both the Underground and the Overground railways. Not being a lover of shopping malls, I will not describe the vast and, in my opinion, unlovely Westfield.
At the eastern apex of the Green, there is a solitary metal pipe sticking up from the ground. Just below its pointed top, it is perforated by six rows of small circular holes. I have not discovered what function this neglected tube serves or served. Maybe, it is related to what remains of a subterranean public toilet nearby. The Edwardian ironwork around its entrances is decorative. According to detailed maps drawn early in the 20th century, there was a public toilet at two of the Green’s three apices. The one that remains is now derelict. After having been used as a subterranean snooker hall for some years, it was converted into a subterranean nightclub called Ginglik in 2002. It provided a stage for up-and-coming artistes as well as for established ones, such as Robin Williams and Ellie Goulding. The club closed in about 2008 because it was prone to flooding.

A few feet west of the disused public subterranean convenience, there is a war memorial. This is a winged Victory holding a sword in her left hand and a wreath in her right. It was sculpted by Henry Charles Fehr (1867-1940) and erected in 1922. Of Swiss heritage but born in London, one of Fehr’s ancestors was a former President of Switzerland.

The north side of the Green is lined with shops and restaurants, which are beneath brick buildings that date back to the early 20th century, or a few years before. They are trimmed with white stone and topped with variously shaped gables.

On the south side of the Green, there is a 1980’s shopping centre, which includes a cinema complex where Bollywood films are shown regularly. Towering above the shopping centre, are four identical blocks of flats built in 1961, designed by Sidney Kaye. Although most of the pre-WW2 buildings, some of which might have suffered bomb-damage, have been replaced by newer ones, there are still a few buildings at the western end of this side of the Green, which were built before either one or both World Wars. Romney Court, a tall art-deco block of flats built in the 1930s, stands between Kaye’s four towers and the remaining older buildings.
A brick and stone, neo-gothic church stands at the north end of Shepherds Bush Road. This was formerly a Baptist chapel, built about 1893. Now, it is used by the Great Commission Ministry Church (founded in the USA, c. 1970), which has owned the building since 2008. Pevsner notes that the church was built in 1907 to the designs of PW Hawkins. However, I noticed that part of the building has a stone with the words: “… laid by Mrs Robert Miller November 3rd, 1892”.

The church’s neighbour is the spectacular art-deco Grampians building. Designed by Maurice E Webb (1880-1939 and Stanley Hinge Hamp (1877-1968) of Collcutt and Hamp, this block of flats was built in 1935. The ground and first floors are occupied by shops with curving glazed facades and flats above them. These curving structures project forward from the main twelve-storey tower.

Minford Gardens, which runs east from Shepherds Bush Road, leads to St Simons, a neo-gothic church with a slender hexagonal steeple decorated with tiles and stones of various colours. It was designed by AW Blomfield (1829-99) and built by 1886. The church contains an organ (c. 1865), which was originally that of Dunblane Cathedral in Scotland. It was acquired in 1893, when the Scottish cathedral was being re-furnished. St Simons stands on the corner of Rockley Road, which leads north to the Green.

Charecroft Way leads off Rockley Road. Most of its south side is occupied by The Shepherds building, with its bold lettering on a vertical structure next to an external metal staircase projecting from the front of the long brick edifice. It was built in the 1960s on disused railway land that was surrounded by terrain that had suffered bad bomb damage during WW2. In 2000, it was refurbished, and another floor was added. Apart from being an office building, this also provides a centre for budding creative entrepreneurs. A few yards north, we return to the Green.
The west side, the shortest of the Green’s three sides, is lined by several historic places of entertainment. At the southern end, there is a pub, the Sindercombe Social. This is next to a building with a tall circular tower, The Empire. The cylindrical tower reminds me of some mediaeval castle towers in Germany. The Empire was built as a theatre in 1903. It was designed by Frank Matcham (1854-1920), who designed many theatres in London including the London Coliseum and the London Palladium. Charlie Chaplin was one of the first to perform in the Empire (in 1906). In 1953, the theatre was bought by the BBC, who renamed it the ‘BBC Television Theatre’. Since 1993, after the BBC had left it, the Empire has become a ‘venue’ for popular music ‘gigs’. Despite its many changes of ownership, the building retains its original external decorations including a bow window decorated with a row of bas-relief ‘putti’ playing musical instruments.

Smaller than the Empire, is its northern neighbour: a long squat building with a façade bearing two snarling lion’s heads on either side of a large, centrally located hemi-circular arch that frames a window above what was originally the front entrance. This building, which until recently was home to an ‘Australasian Bar’, was originally the Palladium cinema. This was built in 1910 and opened as the ‘Shepherd’s Bush Cinematograph Theatre’. It was the sixth of a chain of cinemas opened by the former ‘cinema king’ Montagu Pyke (died 1935). In 1923, after having been closed for a few years due to insufficiencies of the local electricity supply, it re-opened as the ‘Palladium’, which was renamed several times before it finally ceased functioning as a cinema in 1981. Along the southern wall of the building, there is a long notice written in deeply engraved letters. It reads: “Cinematograph Theatre Continuous Performance Seats 1/-, 6d, 3d”. 1/- was ‘one shilling (12d, 12 pennies)’, now 5 pence. After standing derelict for many years, it was reopened in about 2011 as a branch of a chain of ‘Australasian’ bars. This closed in 2013, and the future of the building is now uncertain.
The Palladium’s neighbour to the north is all that remains of a much larger cinema, the former ‘Pavilion’. It has a long brick façade that has been preserved since the rest of the cinema was demolished and replaced by the luxurious Dorsett Hotel, which opened recently. Designed by Frank Verity (1864-1937), a cinema architect, the original cinema opened in 1923. It won Verity a prize from the Royal Institute of British Architects. The architect of New Delhi and Hampstead Garden Suburb, Edwin Lutyens, was one the judging committee. The cinema was hit by a flying bomb in 1944 and reopened in 1955. Until 1962, when it became an Odeon cinema, the Pavilion had been part of the Gaumont chain. The cinema finally closed in 1983 and was used as a bingo hall until 2001. Now, its ‘innards’ have been removed, and replaced with the new hotel.

At the southern end of Wood Lane, overlooking the northwest corner of the Green, there is a pub called The Defector’s Weld. It stands at the start of the busy Uxbridge Road. This late 19th century pub building was originally called the ‘Beaumont Arms’. There has been a pub on this site since the early 19th century, and maybe before. After being renamed ‘Edwards’ for a while, it got its present curious name. The ‘defector’ part refers to a local Cold War spy, and the ‘weld’ part refers to joining together as in welding. I do not know of the identity of the spy, but in 1966 Shepherds Bush was swarming with policemen after the Soviet spy George Blake (who was born ‘George Behar’ in Rotterdam in 1922) escaped from nearby Wormwood Scrubs prison. He lived in Russia until his death in 2020.

The Du Boisson Dance Studio is housed in a brick building a few yards north of the Defectors Weld. Its two-coloured brick façade is decorated with bas-reliefs including the date “1898”. It was originally built to house a drill hall for the Bushmen’s Training Corps and, later, 1st City of London Volunteer Artillery (who served both in the Boer War and WW1). Later, after WW1, it served as a village hall, a community centre, for Shepherds Bush. The present occupants of this building are part of the West London School of Dance, which was founded by a former Rehearsal Director of the Ballet Rambert, Anna Du Boisson.
Macfarlane Road leads west from Wood Lane. At the corner of Hopgood Street, there is a terraced house outside of which I saw a small thicket of tropical palms planted in its small front garden. At the corner where Macfarlane Road makes a right-angle and heads north instead of west, number 2B with its plain triangular pediment looks as if once it was a meeting hall of sorts. Hopgood Street leads into Uxbridge Road opposite an elegant brick building with stone trimmings around its windows and triangular roof gables. Bearing the date 1900 and rising above a row of shops and restaurants, this is Bush Green House, which bears the words “London County Council” (‘LCC’) in gold-coloured letters. The Council existed between 1889 and 1965, when it was superseded by the Greater London Council. The building on Uxbridge Road appears on a detail map made in 1916, and it is marked as a fire station.

Just west of the former fire station, stands the Bush Theatre, which is housed in a brick building adorned with stone trimmings including pillars with Ionic capitals, mansard windows, and a tall chimney stack bearing the date 1895. Designed by Maurice B Adams (1849-1933) and built as the ‘Passmore Edwards Public Library’, this elegant edifice has been, since late 2010, home to the Bush Theatre, which I have attended several times to see plays that are usually overloaded with political content. Before moving into the library, the theatre used to be above the pub at the corner of Goldhawk Road and Shepherds Bush Green. Recently, an attractive glass and steel extension containing a seating area was added to the western side of the ground floor. The Cornish philanthropist John Passmore Edwards (1823-1911), a journalist and newspaper owner, paid for many libraries to be built in London. One of his libraries, that in Whitechapel, became incorporated with its neighbour, the Whitechapel Art Gallery, in 2009. There is another one in west London’s Acton.

The theatre is a few steps away from Shepherds Bush Market. This runs from Uxbridge Road to Goldhawk Road. It is located beneath and beside the railway track, part of the Underground that runs overhead along tracks supported by series of brick arches. The market first opened for business in about 1914. Free of vehicles apart from occasional trains running overhead, this market is a relatively quiet place.
When I visited it, I heard very few, if any, sellers shouting about their wares. Many goods are on sale including meat, fish, fruit, and vegetables; spices; clothes and shoes; flowers: real and artificial; materials for clothes and curtains; electronic goods; music recordings; cooking and other household utensils; refreshments; baggage items; bedding; and much more. The clientele and salespeople hail from all over the world, as do the products that are on sale.

Entering this colourful market is like stepping out of London into a place where Asian, African, and Caribbean cultures flourish in harmony with the uncertain British climate. Although in detail this market looks exotic, its variety is what London is all about. In amongst the shops selling things, there are stalls offering services like tailoring. Some of the market stalls are in the open, but many are sheltered by translucent canopies attached to the railway brickwork. In some places, the market invades the cavernous spaces under the railway arches.
Across a busy road from the southern end of the market, there is the entrance to Goldhawk Road Underground Station. It was opened in 1914. Architecturally unexceptional, part of its eastern platform is supported by a series of steel supports, whose appearance is reminiscent of the elevated parts of the Subway in New York City.

Just west of the market on the other side of the railway tracks, there is another similar, but administratively distinct, market called The New Shepherds Bush Market. Although it seems like its neighbour, it is a separate market. By walking into the depths of the newer market, I suddenly found myself in the older market. The two markets merge beneath one of the railway arches.

Continuing along the Uxbridge Road, we reach a building with a small tower on the corner of Lime Grove. Now a branch of Tesco’s supermarket chain, this was formerly a pub, the ‘White Horse’. The pub existed early in the 19th century and closed before 2011. Between 1949 and ’93, the BBC had TV studios in Lime Grove. Built in the 1920s, the studios were first owned by the Gaumont-British cinema film production and distribution company.

West of the pub is the stone clad neo-gothic church of St Stephen and St Thomas, which was built 1849-50. It was designed by Anthony Salvin (1799-1881), an expert on mediaeval buildings. He also designed the parsonage, now called ‘Glebe House’, in Coverdale Road. The Miles Coverdale Primary School, built in brick, stands where Coverdale Road meets Thornfield Road. Opened in 1916, the school’s name that of a man who lived from 1488 until 1569. Coverdale was an English ecclesiastical reformer and translator of the Bible.
Where Thornfield Road, lined by terraced housing, crosses Godolphin Road, there is a brick church with gothic windows. A Greek flag flies from a flagpole near the church’s eastern entrance. Above this doorway, there are words written in Greek. Designed by AW Blomfield, this church, St Nicholas, was constructed in 1882 (a chancel was added in 1887). The church of St Nicholas, formerly known as ‘St Thomas’, was closed in 1960, and two years later its congregation combined with that of the nearby St Stephen, which was then renamed St Stephen and St Thomas (see above). Since 1965, the church, now St Nicholas, has been used as the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of St Nicholas.

Thornfield Road ends at Stowe Road, which first proceeds north, and then west. Where it changes direction, it passes the entrance to a gated community called Havilland Mews. This was built on the site of the former Paragon Works. The works belonged to the Brilliant Sign Company, which was founded in 1888. They brought about a revolution in shop sign technology with their ‘Brilliant letter’ which, according to a company website:
“…was a pressed copper sheet with a v-shaped cross section so as to imitate the classic incised wooden facia letter. These were then fixed to the rear of the painted glass by way of flanges with shellac, furthermore they were then covered with lead foil to then ‘hermetically seal’ them from the weather and condensation.”
In 1907, the company bought the three-acre site at Stowe Road, where they built a factory that continued production until 1976 – the year the company was ‘wound up’. In 1999, the company was revived under new management, and now has a factory in Buckinghamshire.

Coningham Road connects Stowe Road with Goldhawk Road, which runs from Shepherds Bush Green west to Turnham Green. The name of this thoroughfare derives from John Goldhawk, who owned land in Fulham in the 14th century. It has been called ‘Gould Hauk Road’ in the past. In Thomas Faulkner’s “The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Hammersmith”, published in 1839, he suggested that the road followed the course of a Roman Road built in the first century AD. This is confirmed in later accounts. In the 1870s, the road was called ‘New Road’, as well as ‘Roman Road’ (on an 1866 map), but it reverted to Goldhawk after the mid-1890s.
O’Donoghue’s pub on the corner of Coningham and Goldhawk roads. Its ground floor is adorned with pillars and pilasters bearing Ionic capitals. It was formerly the ‘Swakely Hotel’. This is a 19th century pub building, which does not appear on a detailed map drawn in 1866. In contrast, the former ‘Wheatsheaf’ pub almost opposite on the corner of the now fashionable Brackenbury Road was in existence in 1866. It is a three-storey building with decorative ironwork above its main entrance. Its name changed to the ‘Brackenbury Arms’, which closed in 2009. Now (2017), the premises house the Zaman Lounge, a restaurant with ‘African’ and ‘Mediterranean’ food.

Neighbouring the Zaman Lounge, the first house on Brackenbury Road is a small apartment block in a building, Brickfield House, that looks as if it might have been built more than 100 years ago. In the 19th century, there were brickfields in the area. By the mid-1890s, these had been built on as part of the spread of residential housing developments. Nearby, Brackenbury Primary School, housed in a large brick building with triangular gables and a small wooden tower, was already built by 1893.

Heading east along Goldhawk Road, we pass a building on the corner of St Stephens Avenue. Its ground floor is contemporary, but the upper storeys facing Goldhawk Road look Victorian. This is deceptive because this old-looking façade is part of a very much more contemporary building. This is the Townhouse Mews, a recently constructed development of twelve up-market housing units. The housing complex is built on land that had previously been occupied by ‘Townhouse Studios’, a recording studio set up by Richard Branson in 1978. Artists who have recorded there include Phil Collins, Duran Duran, Robbie Williams, and Elton John.

The small Shepherd and Flock pub, on a corner plot and decorated with pillars and pilasters that serve no obvious structural function, is further east along Goldhawk Road. It was built in 1869. It has an attractive painted sign hanging over the pavement. A few doors east of this pub, there is a shop adorned with words in the Ethiopian alphabet (Amharic). Called Messi Abyssinia, the shop sells fashion accessories and Ethiopian outfits. Its presence is one of many signs of the area’s multi-ethnic population.
On the corner of Richford Street and Goldhawk Road, stands a branch of Kerr & Co, an estate agent. Their ground floor offices retain bas-reliefs including the date 1898 and the three feathers of the Prince of Wales. This building housed the ‘British Prince’ pub, which was already in existence by 1855. It closed in about 2013, after having been renamed ‘The Prince’, and then ‘Raving Buddha’. The narrow, small watch- and clock-repairer’s shop a few feet west of Goldhawk Road Underground station, AR Roberts, looks as if it has remained unaltered for many decades. It is popular and rated reliable.

Just east of the railway bridge, the shop that used to house A Cooke’s ‘Traditional Pie, Mash, Liquor, and Eels’ - formerly favourite foods of Londoners – looked (December 2017) as if it about to be demolished, or totally changed. The company was started by Alfred Cooke in 1899. He moved to the now derelict shop on Goldhawk Road in 1934, which served customers until it closed in 2015. Alfred’s great-grandson, Mike Boughton, continues the family tradition by providing customers with the same fare via an on-line delivery service. The old pie shop is in a terrace of shabby two-storey buildings that, at its eastern end, abuts a late Victorian block of flats, Pennard Mansions, built in brick with stone window surrounds. Currently the ground floor is occupied by textile shops that bear Arabic lettering on their signboards. Roger Waters of The Pink Floyd (a popular rock music group) and his wife, the potter Judy Trim (1943-2001), lived in the Mansions in the late 1960s.

The elaborately decorated brick building with a corner turret with a bell-shaped tiled roof on the corner of Goldhawk Road and Shepherds Bush Green, where we started this exploration, is now called the Sindercombe Social. It is a place for drinking, dining, and dancing. The building began life as the ‘Bush Hotel’, a 19th century pub. Between 1972, when it was established, and 2010, the Bush Theatre (see above) occupied the first floor of this hostelry in what had before been the dance studio of Lionel Blair. ‘Sindercombe’, the name of the present establishment, which opened in 2014, has an interesting history. Miles Sindercombe (died 1657) was involved in at least two plots to assassinate members of the government of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658). Cromwell’s biographer Antonia Fraser wrote in her “Cromwell Our Chief of Men” that Sindercombe and accomplices:

“… had in the first place intended to fire at Cromwell with ‘screwed guns’, each containing twelve bullets and a slug, on his route to Hampton Court…”
The place chosen was a banqueting room in Hammersmith (i.e., in Shepherds Bush), where it was known that the coach carrying Cromwell would have to slow down because the road outside it was narrow and in bad condition. On the day that the shooting was planned, Cromwell escaped with his life because he had chosen to travel by boat instead of by road.

Sindercombe was less fortunate. Convicted of treason, he was sentenced to be hung, drawn, and quartered. He escaped this awful fate by killing himself with poison, which had been smuggled into his cell in the Tower of London (see: “Oxford Dictionary of National Biography”). Walter Besant wrote in his “London North of the Thames”:

“At Shepherds Bush, in 1657, one Miles Sindercomb hired a house for the purpose of assassinating Oliver Cromwell … the precise spot on which the attempt took place is impossible to identify. It was somewhere near ‘the corner of Golders Lane’, says Faulkner, but the lane has long since been obliterated.”

Faulkner (writing in 1839: see above) is more specific than Besant. He noted:

“The house which Syndercomb hired for the purpose of killing the Protector was an inn, much frequented by travellers on the great western road. It was situate [sic] at the eastern end of the Gould Hawk Road, which was at that time very narrow, and nearly impassable. This old house was pulled down about sixty years ago.”

This would place the scene of the intended crime close to the present-day Sindercombe Social.

When I first set out to explore Shepherds Bush, I was afraid that I would not find much of interest there. I hope that what has been described shows that the area, which lacks the charm of, say, Chelsea or Kensington, is not without its own fascination. Although there be no more sheep to be seen, there is more than the Westfield shopping centre to attract visitors to the ‘Bush’.

West of Shepherd’s Bush lies the former village of Acton. Today, visitors to this busy part of west London might find it hard to believe that before the Victorian era, this area was sparsely populated countryside.
ACTON

LOLA LIVED HERE BRIEFLY

Acton is not usually given high priority on lists of places to see, which visitors to London might compile. However, this district in west London, once a distinct borough (between 1865 and 1965), now part of the Borough of Ealing, is not devoid of interest. After a visit to our dentist, whose surgery is close to Acton’s High Street, we looked around the area.

Churchfield Street, filled with small shops and a good selection of eateries, leads past a small cemetery and a new shopping mall, eastwards to Acton Central Overground Station. Opened in 1853 as ‘Acton’ station, it was at first a stop on the North and South Western Junction Railway. In 1925, it was renamed ‘Acton Central’. The original 19th century railway building built in about 1876, a rather too grand edifice for such a humble station, has now been converted into a pub/restaurant, whose menu looks appetising. Crossing the tracks, we reach Acton Park, about which I will say more soon.

The name ‘Acton’ might derive from Old English words meaning ‘oak town’. At the beginning of the 19th century, the parish of Acton was mostly agricultural land with a small population of about 1400 souls. Between 1861 and 1871, the population increased from about 4000 to about 8300, reflecting the urbanisation of the area. By the mid-1880s, it had reached about 12000. No doubt the accessibility of London via the railway helped increase the area’s attractiveness for people wishing to live in leafy suburbs within easy reach of their workplaces in the centre of the metropolis.

Many of the streets near the station are lined with substantial, well-built houses.
Acton Park is an attractive, municipal recreation area with lawns, trees, bushes, a café, a putting green, and other facilities including a ‘skate park’ and a children’s nursery. At the northern edge of the park opposite Goldsmiths Buildings, there stands a fine stone obelisk. This was moved to its present position in January 1904 from its original site in the grounds of the now demolished Derwentwater House on Acton’s Horn Lane. It commemorates James Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Derwentwater (1679-1716). The date of his death is significant, as I will explain.

James was the son of the 2nd Earl (1655-1705) and Lady Mary Tudor (1673-1726), whose parents were King Charles II and one of his mistresses, the actress Mary ‘Moll’ Davis (c1648-1708). James was brought up in France in the court of the exiled James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766), ‘The Old Pretender’, son of the Roman Catholic King James II of England, who was forced to leave England by the Protestant William of Orange. James Stuart, encouraged both by a desire to re-establish the line of James II on the English Throne and by the French monarchy, made various attempts to gain the Throne of England. One of these was in 1715, a year after the Protestant Hanoverian King George I had become crowned King of England. In December 1715, The Old Pretender landed in Scotland, having sailed from France.

In 1709, James Radcliffe, whose memorial stands in Acton Park, sailed to England to visit his recently inherited estates in Cumberland and Northumberland. In 1715, he joined the conspiracy to put his companion since childhood, The Old Pretender, on the Throne of England. A warrant for his arrest was issued, but at first, he evaded capture by going into hiding. At the Battle of Preston (9th to 14th November 1715), when the Jacobite forces fighting for The Old Pretender were defeated, Radcliffe was arrested and taken to The Tower of London. After various attempts to reprieve him, he was executed in February 1716. His heart was taken to a convent in Paris, where it remains. The monument was erected by Radcliffe’s widow, Lady Derwentwater, who was living in Acton at the time of his execution. Her home, Derwentwater House, which can be seen marked on a detailed map produced in the early 1890s but not on one published in 1914, stood where Churchfield Road East meets Horn Lane, where today the new shopping centre, ‘The Oaks’, now stands. Edward Walford, writing in 1883, noted in connection with the house: “It is said that the iron gates at the end of the garden have never been opened since the day her lord last passed through them on his way to the Tower.”
Acton Park was created in 1888, mostly on land that had been owned by The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths. Across the road from the park and opposite the obelisk, you can see the elegant Goldsmiths Alms-houses. This building was erected in 1811 and enlarged in 1838. It was built on land left to the Goldsmiths Company by John Perryn (who moved to Acton in 1654 and whose last will and testament is dated 1656). One of Acton’s residential roads is named after him.

Tree-lined Goldsmiths Avenue is just 360 yards north of Acton Central Station. Number 78 used to be named ‘Tilak House’ in honour of the Indian freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920). In early May 1907, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), a freedom fighter and father of the idea of ‘Hindutva’, an expression of Indian nationalism which underlies the political philosophy of India’s currently ruling BJP party, held a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 at this house. The house was then the home of Nitin Sen Dwarkadas, brother-in-law of another Indian patriot who lived in London, Shyamaji Krishnavarma (1850-1930). Today, there is no memorial to these people or this event.
Other attractions in Acton include St Marys Church (established by 1228, but the current building dates from 1865-67) and its nearby peaceful rectangular cemetery on West Churchfield Road. The Old Town Hall with its accompanying municipal offices was built on the site of the former Berrymede Priory. Designed by the architects Raffles and Gridley, the town hall was built in 1908-10, and extended in 1939.

Berrymead Priory, once a dwelling house, is commemorated by a thoroughfare named Berrymead Avenue, where our dentist practises. It was built on the grounds formerly occupied by William Savile, 2nd Marquess of Halifax (1665-1700), who died here. The priory must have been lovely. Walford noted that it was:

“… a picturesque Gothic edifice of the Strawberry Hill type, and occupied the centre of several acres of ground, which are planted with fine trees and evergreens.”

One of the priory’s better-known inhabitants was the novelist and politician Edward Bulwer (1803-1873), Lord Lytton, who lived there between 1835 and 1836. In 1849, the place was purchased by the wealthy cavalry officer George Drafford Heald, who lived here briefly with his wife, the glamorous Irish born actress and courtesan Lola Montez (1821-1861), one time mistress of King Ludwig I of Bavaria and of the composer Franz Liszt. They had married in 1848. The Healds had to flee to France soon after their marriage, which contravened the terms of her divorce with a previous spouse. Lola and George’s marriage did not last long. However, the building named ‘Berrymead Priory’ lasted longer, until 1982 when it was demolished.

Our Lady of Lourdes, a small Roman Catholic Church built in 1902 in the Romanesque style, was designed by Edward Goldie (1856-1921), who built many other Catholic churches. This church is on the High Street close to another decorative public building, The Passmore Edwards Library, built in 1898-99 and designed by Maurice Bingham Adams (1849-1933) in what Nikolaus Pevsner describes as:

“… his typical rather bulging Baroque paraphrase of the accepted Tudor of the late Victorian decades.”

Adams also designed the Passmore Edwards Library in Shepherds Bush.

There is more to Acton than I have described, but maybe what I have written might whet your appetite to explore a part of London that is somewhat off the tourist’s beaten track.
Low flying aircraft coming to land at Heathrow Airport often traverse an area of west London, just south of Acton, noted for a battle during the great 17th century Civil War and for being the site of one of the world’s first garden suburbs. This area, which straddles the boundary between the boroughs of Ealing and Chiswick, is worthy of a visit.
TURNHAM GREEN AND BEDFORD PARK

SUBURBAN DREAM?

Until the 1840s, Turnham Green, near Chiswick, was a small country hamlet that ran along the road which connected Hammersmith and Brentford. It was here that during the Civil War, the Parliamentarians defeated the Royalists in a battle on the 13th of November 1642. It was close to Turnham Green that a band of conspirators led by George Barclay (c1636-1710) planned to assassinate King William III in 1696. The plot failed. By the 1870s, the former hamlet was beginning to become more urbanised, and by 1900, it was no longer surrounded by countryside but swallowed up in urban development. The heart of what was once the hamlet is occupied by green open space, a park now known as ‘Turnham Green’.

We start our perambulation at the circular building housing Chiswick Park Station, which was designed by Charles Holden (1875-1960) and is a fine example of art-deco. It was built between 1931 and 1932 to replace an earlier edifice. Turnham Green is a short walk south of this station. The Battle of Turnham Green was fought close by. The Royalist lines were probably near the site of the station. The Parliamentarian lines ran approximately from the site of the current Turnham Green Underground Station to the grounds of nearby Chiswick House.

Turnham Green, the green space in the centre of what was once the hamlet, contains a distinctive Victorian gothic church with a tall spire: Christ Church. Built in dark grey and white masonry, it was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott and his partner William Moffatt and completed in 1843, but a chancel was added in 1887. Inside, it is far lighter and airier than its rather sombre exterior suggests.

The green space is surrounded by buildings that look as if they were built mostly in the early or mid-19th century. Chiswick Town Hall, built in brick
with white stone facings is a fine example of Victorian municipal architecture. Pevsner describes its style as ‘Italianate’. It was completed in 1876. A letter box outside the Town Hall was painted gold to celebrate the rower Pete Reed who won a gold medal for rowing during the 2012 Olympic Games. A short row of four houses on Heathfield Terrace (numbers 10 to 13), next to the west side of the Town Hall, has a late 18th century appearance.

The rustic-sounding Barley Mow Passage leads east from the Green. On its south side stands a huge brick building built in 1893, once the factory of Sanderson’s, the wallpaper manufacturer. Almost opposite is a later extension to the factory, built in 1902. Clad in white glazed brickwork and decorated with art-nouveau trimmings, it is the only factory building that was designed by the architect Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857-1941), a major exponent of the Arts and Crafts style. Nearby in Bourne Place (close to Dukes Avenue), is the Chiswick Memorial Club, which is housed in an elegant building with three rows of large sash windows. Close to the club and with its north side on Chiswick High Road, there is a large, attractive church built in brick in a neo-classical Roman basilica style. This is the Roman Catholic church of Our Lady of Grace & St Edward. It was built in 1904, designed by Kelly and Birchall (according to Pevsner) or by Kelly and Adams (according to the church’s website). Its tower was added by Giles Gilbert Scott in about 1930 to commemorate victims of WW1. Try to see its wonderfully light and airy spacious interior with its rows of Corinthian columns supporting the ceilings of the aisles on either side of the lofty nave.

Next, we make our way, maybe via Fisher’s Lane, to Chiswick Common, a pleasant grassy open space surrounded by trees. The common runs along the south side of the District Line tracks. North of the tracks, the open space is called ‘Acton Green’. At the east end of the Common, we reach Turnham Green Underground Station, which is further away from the Green than Chiswick Park Station, where we started.

Bath Road runs east from Turnham Green Station. The Tabard pub is at its western end. It is a fine example of architecture characteristic of the Arts and Crafts Movement that thrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It
was built in 1880 and faces the Church of St Michael’s and All Angels. Consecrated in 1880, it, like The Tabard, was designed by Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912), who designed several other buildings nearby. Pevsner, the architectural historian, and often blunt critic, wrote of the church:

“The exterior is Shaw at his best, inexhaustible in his inventiveness. The combination of Perpendicular ground floor with upper features taken from the c17 and c18 comes off most happily.”

Its interior is Victorian gothic with a light touch. The nave has an attractive hammerbeam ceiling. Apart from enjoying seeing inside and outside this building, one feature caught my attention. It is a clock attached to the outside of the church. The beam supporting it bears the words “Spion. Kop. South Africa. 1900”. This refers to a battle at Spion Kop during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The clock was placed to remember one Harold Wilson (not the former Prime Minister, but 2nd Lieutenant Harold AC Wilson, who fell at Spion Kop). The church and The Tabard form part of Bedford Park.

During my childhood, I was brought up in north London’s verdant Hampstead Garden Suburb, whose construction began in 1904. The suburb, like other developments created as part of the Garden City Movement (founded in 1898 by Ebenezer Howard [1850-1928]) was designed, according to an article in Wikipedia, to combine the advantages of rural and city environments whilst avoiding the disadvantages of both.
Other early examples of this type of urban development include Letchworth Garden City, Bournville, and Welwyn Garden City. It is said that Bedford Park near Turnham Green is probably the first example of what has become known as a ‘Garden Suburb’ development, although originally it was not known as such. Pevsner noted:

“Its reputation as the earliest garden suburb needs some qualification. Trees and green spaces … are found in many earlier suburbs; the novelty of Bedford Park is their combination with ‘artistically designed’ houses … inspired not by classical or Gothic pattern books but by the red brick and tiled idiom derived chiefly from the home counties vernacular of the c17 and c18…”

He added that the idea was to recreate the:

“… relaxed informal mood of a market town or village…”, in “… a completely speculatively built suburb.”

And, in the case of Bedford Park this ideal has been almost achieved, but not quite because the suburb, attractive though it is, has a rather staid bourgeois feel about it.

The development of Bedford Park began in 1875, and for a time (beginning in 1877) Richard Norman Shaw was the ‘Estate architect’. Many of the houses erected in the state were designed in Shaw’s Queen Anne style. Much of the estate was built by 1886. The best way to explore this pioneering example of urban (or suburban) development is to amble leisurely along its streets. I will point out a few places of interest, but I am sure you will come across others.

Bedford Park grew up around Bedford House, a late 18th century dwelling in which the botanist and pioneer of the study of orchids, John Lindley (1799-1865), lived from 1836 until his death. Number 36 Blenheim Road bears has a huge, glazed studio window above which there is a decorative panel containing the letters “J” and “N” and the date 1879. This was the home and studio of the artist Joseph Nash junior (died 1922). His father, the better-known artist Joseph Nash, died the year before the date on the building.
Other artists lived in the attractive, middle-class Bedford Park including Camille Pisarro; John Butler Yeats (1839-1922) and his son the poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939); and the painters Hariett (1852-1891) and Henry Mariott Paget (1856-1936). Other notable residents have included, to mention but a few, the Ukrainian anarchist Sergius Stepniak (1851-1895); the Irish dramatist John Todhunter (1839-1916); and Britain’s second Asian (Indian born) MP, Mancherjee Bhownagree (1851-1933). The architect Thomas Afflcleet Greeves (1917-1997) is commemorated by a plaque affixed to number 12 Newton Grove, where he lived from 1951 onwards. He was a co-founder of the Bedford Park Society, which tries to preserve the character of the suburb.

Not far away at 16 Newton Grove, are the premises of Orchard House School, a preparatory school. This is linked to a neighbouring building with a pair of garage (or stable) doors and what looks like a first-floor entrance doorway (without steps leading up to it). I am unclear for what purpose it was designed.

The London Buddhist Vihara, a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple, occupies a handsome house on The Avenue. It stands next door to Bedford House. The Avenue leads south and joins South Parade that forms the northern edge of Acton Green. South Parade contains a few shops, which are within easy walking distance of all parts of Bedford Park. Like Hampstead Garden Suburb, where I was brought up, there are no shops within the Bedford Park estate. However, shopping areas in Hampstead Garden Suburb are far further from the heart of the residential area than they are in the smaller Bedford Park.

A visit to Bedford Park is worthwhile for enthusiasts of the Arts and Crafts Movement as most of the buildings in the estate are fine examples of the style developed by it. It is also of interest to see a development that was conceived to be a kind of residential utopia. Whether or not this has been achieved, I leave it to you to decide. While you are doing that, here are the (translated) words of the German Hermann Muthesius (1861-1927) in his book “Das englische Haus”, published in 1904:
“There was at the time virtually no development that could compare in artistic charm with Bedford Park, least of all had the small house found anything like so satisfactory and artistic and economic solution as here. And herein lies the immense importance of Bedford Park in the history of the English house. It signifies, neither more nor less, the starting point of the smaller modern house, which immediately spread from there over the whole country.”

You have now reached the end of this personal selection of places in west London. There are several places about which I have not written, not because they are necessarily unworthy of visiting but because they have yet to capture my imagination. I hope that what I have written will encourage you to visit at least some of my selection and maybe to venture into places that I have not described. Almost every district in west London, however dull it might seem at first glance or by reputation, offers sights that have visual interest and/or historical significance. To discover these oft hidden delights, it is best to explore on foot. Walking west London gives me great pleasure. I hope it will do the same for you.
For the sake of brevity, I have decided not to include a list of the sources of the information contained in my text. Much of it comes from innumerable articles on the Internet, whose accuracy I have always tried to check, and the rest comes from many books that I have collected over the years. I hope that what I have written accurately reflects what I found in my sources, and I apologise to anyone who discovers errors that have inadvertently crept in my book despite the care I have taken whilst researching it.
INDEX

Acton, 5, 93, 94, 151, 153, 226, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236
Acton Park, 233, 234, 235
Addison, 44, 47
Albert Memorial, 128, 136, 137
Allen Street, 52, 53, 54
Alperton, 5, 85, 91, 92, 93, 95
Archive Bookstore, 26
Armenian, 42, 54
tag-deco, 38, 39, 42, 92, 147, 222, 223, 238
Arts and Crafts Movement, 99, 100, 103, 116, 239, 242
Arts and Crafts style, 80, 89, 99, 100, 103, 116, 239, 242
asylum, 83, 84, 85, 105, 162
Avondale Park, 213, 214
Ballet Rambert, 210, 225
Bannister, Roger, 21
Barnes Bridge, 96, 97, 110, 112, 163
Battle of Brentford, 75
Bayswater, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 36, 127, 128, 129, 132, 195
Bazalgette, 191
Bazalgette, Joseph, 98
BBC, 224, 228
Beaufort House, 80, 173, 174, 175, 176, 180, 184
Bedford Park, 5, 111, 240, 241, 242, 243
Berrymede, 236
Biba, 39, 52
Boatmen’s Institute, 80
Bollo Brook, 163
Bolsheviks, 164
Bombay, 15, 23
Boston, 5, 108, 146, 147, 148, 154, 155
Boston Manor, 5, 108, 146, 147, 148, 154, 155
bottle kiln, 212, 213
Bradmore House, 97
Braunston, 77, 80, 82
Brent Bridge House, Hendon, 74
Brentford, 5, 35, 67, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81,
82, 84, 96, 111, 115, 147, 148, 153
Brentford Bridge, 77
Brentford Monument, 75, 80
Brentford, Six Bells pub, 77
Brewery, 21, 56, 80, 104, 105, 107
British Museum, 33, 168, 170, 173, 175
Brompton Cemetery, 187, 190
Browning’s Island, 64
Brunel, 13, 14, 77, 177
Burlington, 107, 160, 162, 163, 173, 174, 175
Burlingwick, 111
Burne-Jones, 40
Bush Theatre, 226, 231
Bushy Park, 137, 138, 139, 141, 142, 143, 144
Butterfield, William, 193
Byron, 64
Caesar, 75
Campden Hill Towers, 208
Campden House, 36, 55, 122, 124
Carlton Tavern, 21, 22
Cassivelaunus, 75
Cathedral of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God and Holy Royal Martyrs in London, 164
cemetery, 16, 59, 102, 176, 233, 236
Chamberlain, Neville, 153, 167
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, 187
Chelsea Flower Show, 127, 180
Chelsea Physic Garden, 169, 172
Cheyne Walk, 167, 168, 174, 177, 178
Chiswick Common, 239
Chiswick Eyot, 104
Chiswick Park Station, 238
Chiswick Town Hall, 238
Church Street, 36, 37, 38, 106, 107, 108, 116, 118, 124, 174, 197
Churchill Arms pub, 36
cinema, 42, 209, 222, 224, 225, 228
Civil War, 75, 117, 184, 201, 237, 238
Clementi, 36
coal, 69, 83, 100, 115, 202, 203, 204
Commonwealth Institute, 51
Corney House, 110
Coronet theatre, 196, 209
Courtauld Institute, 157
Coverdale Road, 228
Cremorne, 180, 181, 182
Crimean War, 15, 54, 80
Cromwell, Oliver, 140, 231, 232
Crosby Hall, 183, 184, 185, 186
Czech and Slovak, 196
Decoy Pond, 74
Defector’s Weld, 225
Derry and Toms, 39
Derwentwater, 234
Design Museum, 51
Devonshire, 108, 111, 112, 162, 163
diamorphine, 15
Domesday Book, 14, 35, 114
do double-headed eagles, 41
Doves Coffee House, 100
Duke of Northumberland’s River, 118
Dukes Meadows, 110, 111, 112, 113, 166
Duran Duran, 230
Ealing, 5, 84, 89, 90, 91, 93, 144, 145, 151, 153, 163, 233
Ealing Road, 89, 90, 91, 93
East Africa, 90
Edgware Road, 5, 9, 10, 14, 16, 23, 25, 67, 136
Edwardes Square, 42, 43
Electric Cinema, 199
Elfin Tree, 134
Elton John, 230
Fan Bridge, 65, 66
Fanelli, 140
fascist, 19, 213
Ferry Lane, 75
Flemming, Alexander, 15
Foscolo, 106
Freston, 216, 217, 218, 219
Frestonia, 218
Frestonian Gallery, 217
Fulham Pottery, 212
Fulham, All Saints, 192
Fulham, Bishops Palace, 192
Gate Cinema, 196, 204, 209
George II, 127, 131, 133, 150
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert Scott</td>
<td>37, 38, 42, 88, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GK Chesterton</td>
<td>43, 44, 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glaxo Smith Kline</td>
<td>78, 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester Road</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golborne Road</td>
<td>58, 60, 63, 201, 213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldhawk Road</td>
<td>226, 228, 229, 230, 231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldie</td>
<td>41, 42, 236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmiths Alms-houses</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmiths Buildings</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grampians building</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Union Canal</td>
<td>5, 9, 14, 23, 58, 59, 63, 65, 67, 69, 71, 76, 77, 80, 82, 84, 85, 93, 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gravel pits</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Exhibition of 1851</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Fire of 1666</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great West Road</td>
<td>35, 96, 108, 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>10, 18, 54, 164, 229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
<td>18, 229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenfell</td>
<td>205, 215, 220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gresham, Thomas</td>
<td>147, 155, 156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>89, 90, 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnersbury</td>
<td>148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadid, Zaha</td>
<td>129, 135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammersmith</td>
<td>5, 16, 35, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 113, 119, 229, 232, 237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammersmith Bridge</td>
<td>96, 98, 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampton Court Palace</td>
<td>137, 138, 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanwell</td>
<td>5, 76, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrow Road</td>
<td>17, 59, 61, 63, 64, 65, 87, 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaps, Stanley</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heathrow Airport</td>
<td>5, 118, 142, 147, 152, 160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry VIII</td>
<td>110, 114, 138, 166, 167, 168, 169, 172, 173, 174, 175, 184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heythrop College</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Street Kensington</td>
<td>38, 41, 44, 50, 52, 54, 124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindutva</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippodrome race course</td>
<td>206, 207, 209, 210, 211, 212, 215, 216, 219, 220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogarth</td>
<td>10, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland House</td>
<td>50, 121, 122, 123, 124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Holland Park, 5, 45, 47, 50, 51, 84, 122, 123, 195, 197, 207, 208, 211, 219, 220
Holland Street, 36, 37, 38, 109, 125
Holman-Hunt, 46
Holocaust, 131
Holst, 98, 100
Hornton, 36, 38, 53, 124, 125
Hornton Street, 36, 38, 53, 124, 125
horse-racing, 206
Hunt, Leigh, 11, 42
Hyde Park, 5, 10, 16, 17, 27, 28, 29, 32, 35, 119, 127, 128, 130, 132, 139
India, 1, 13, 15, 23, 32, 33, 34, 50, 89, 90, 91, 149, 151, 157, 160, 184, 235
Indian, 32, 33, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 121, 122, 235
Indian subcontinent, 85, 88
Iranian, 38, 43, 44
Irving, Henry, 11
Isleworth, 5, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119
Italian Gardens, 128, 129, 132, 133
Jamaica, 121, 122, 170, 171
Jenner, 128

Jewish, 1, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 72, 185, 215
John Donne, 10
Johnsons Island, 77
Jones, Inigo, 173, 174, 175, 180
Kelmscott House, 100, 101, 103
Kensal Green, 16, 59, 219
Kensington Chapel, 53
Kensington Church Street, 36
Kensington Gardens, 5, 120, 126, 127, 130, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 139, 197
Kensington Gore, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 56
Kensington Palace, 35, 39, 51, 126, 129, 133, 134
Kensington Roof Gardens, 39
Kensington Square, 39, 40, 41, 53
Kensington Temple, 209, 210
Kent, William, 55, 98, 132, 149, 163, 173
Kenwood House, 155, 157
Kilburn, 16, 21, 87, 127
King Canute, 75
King Charles I, 138, 140, 143
King Charles II, 100, 169, 234
King Edward VI, 147, 155, 168, 175
King Henry VII, 167
King James II, 234
King Ludwig I of Bavaria, 236
King Richard III, 183
King William III, 238
Kings Road, 169, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 182
Knightsbridge, 127
Ladbroke Grove, 59, 210, 211
Lansdowne House, 207
Latimer Road, 216
Le Sueur, 140
Leighton, 44, 47, 49, 50, 133
Leighton House, 47, 49, 50, 133
Lido, 132
Lime Grove, 228
Lindsey House, 176, 177, 179
Lingard House, 105
Lisson Gallery, 26
Lisson Grove, 10, 23, 24
Little Venice, 5, 16, 23, 64, 67, 69, 71, 80
Lock Flight, Hanwell, 82, 84
London Apprentice, 115, 116, 118
Long Water, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132
Longford River, 138, 141, 142, 143
Lord Holland, 120, 121, 122
Lord’s Cricket Ground, 70
Lots Road Power Station, 182
Lower Mall, 98
Lunatic, 82
M4, 82, 84, 96, 149, 152, 160
Maida Hill Tunnel, 67, 68, 70
Mawson Row, 104
Meanwhile Gardens, 59, 60, 61, 201
Melbury Road, 44, 45, 46, 47, 50
Metro-land, 86, 94
Metropolitan Line, 25, 86
Michell, John, 200
Middlesex, 14, 83, 84, 87, 93, 96, 153, 162, 203
Mill Hill, 28, 29, 30, 72
Mitchison, 102
Montagu, Samuel, 18, 19
Montez, Lola, 236
Moore, Henry, 120, 129, 132, 134
Moravian, 175, 176, 177
More, Thomas, 166, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 180, 182, 184, 186
Moroccan, 58, 61
Moscow Road, 18
Mosley, Oswald, 19, 117
National Trust, 156, 158, 179
Neasden Temple, 91
New York City, 26, 34, 228
Newcombe House, 208
Newton, 37, 38, 157, 168
Nightingale, Florence, 15
North Circular Road, 73, 86, 93, 148, 149, 152
North Kensington, 58
Norwegian War Memorial, 130
Notting Hill, 5, 16, 18, 19, 20, 36, 55, 84, 195, 196, 197, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 208, 212, 214, 220
Notting Hill Gate, 16, 36, 55, 84, 195, 196, 197, 198, 202, 203, 204, 205, 208
Old Well House, Holland Park, 84
Olympia exhibition halls, 44
Orme Square, 18
Orme, Edward, 18
Orwell, George, 198
Osterley, 5, 149, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159
Our Lady of Grace & St Edward, 239
Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, 192
Paddington Arm, 9, 14, 23, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 67, 69, 71, 80, 93
Paddington Basin, 63
Paddington Green, 9, 10, 11, 12
Paddington Recreation Ground, 21
Paddington Station, 12, 13, 16, 64, 65
Pakistan, 90, 91
Palladian, 149, 150, 160, 162, 163, 173
Park Lane, 5, 35
Passmore Edwards, 226, 236
Peel Street, 54, 55, 56
Peerless Pump Building, 75
penicillln, 15
Penty, 116, 117, 118
Peter Pan, 132, 134
Pevsner, 108, 157, 158, 223, 236
Piccadilly Line, 92, 97, 147
Pink Floyd, 231
Pitt Street, 124, 125, 126
Pitzhanger, 144, 145, 146
Polunin, 104
Pope, 105
Portobello, 19, 58, 63, 121, 195, 196, 197, 205, 213, 216
Portobello Road, 19, 58, 63, 196, 197, 198, 199, 201, 205, 213
Portuguese, 201
Potomac Pond, 152
Pottery Lane, 211, 212
Praed Street, 14, 15, 16
Putney Bridge, 190, 191, 192, 212
Queen Anne, 45, 97, 129, 140
Queen Caroline, 97, 127, 131, 132, 133
Queen Elizabeth I, 110, 147, 155, 167
Queen Victoria, 31, 44, 47, 50, 134, 136, 139
Ravilious, 102
Receiving House of the Royal Humane Society, 130
Regent’s Canal, 67
Regents Canal, 9, 64, 69, 70, 71
Rennie, 130, 132
River Brent, 5, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 82, 84, 86, 87, 93, 147
River Westbourne, 127, 128
Robert Adam, 29, 155, 156, 157, 158, 163
Rolling Bridge, 65
Rothschild, 151, 153, 215
Round Pond, 133
Royal Albert Hall, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 136
Royal College of Art, 31
Royal College of Organists, 31
Royal Crescent, 220
Royal Hospital Chelsea, 180
Ruskin, 177, 178
Russell Flint, 57
Russian Orthodox, 164
Salter’s, 168
Serpentine, 120, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137
Serpentine Sackler, 129
Shakespeare, 183, 185, 200
Shaw, Richard Norman, 41, 45, 56, 240, 241
Shepherds Bush, 5, 52, 217, 219, 220, 221, 223, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 231, 232, 236
Shepherds Bush Station, 221
Sherrins Farm Open Space, 88
Shillibeer, 12
Shri Vallabh Nidhi Mandir, 91, 92
Sibelius, 36
Siddons, 9, 10, 11
Sikh, 219
Sindercombe, 224, 231, 232
slavery, 30, 121, 122, 171, 176
Sloane, 127, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176
Sloane Ranger, 172
Smirke, 150, 151, 152
Soane, John, 145, 146
Soaphouse Creek, 75, 76
Spion. Kop, 240
St Augustine, 21, 22
St Barnabas church, 44
St Bernard’s Hospital, 84
St Mary Abbotts, 38
St Mary Magdalene, 63
St Mary’s Convent, 80
St Mary’s Hospital, 15, 65
St Marys Hospital, 13, 21
St Nicholas, 104, 106, 110, 229
St Petersburgh Place, 17, 18, 19
St Sarkis, 42
Staines, 195
Stonebridge Park, 86
swamp cypresses, 143
Synagogue, 17, 19, 20, 219
Syon House, 114, 118
Talleyrand, 40
telegraphy, 100
Thames Lock, 76
Thames Soap Works, 75
The Butts, 77, 79, 80
The Gate theatre, 196, 204, 209, 210
The Magazine, 135
The Print Room theatre, 209
The Royal Hospital Chelsea, 127
Thornycroft, 45, 104
totem pole, 142, 143
Town Hall, 36, 38, 99, 236, 237
Trellick Tower, 58, 60, 62, 66
TS Eliot, 40
Turner, 79, 182
UFOs, 200
Underground, 11, 16, 25, 36, 52, 70, 72, 92, 95, 97, 103, 127, 128, 147, 163, 196, 197, 212, 216, 221, 226, 228, 231
Upper Mall, 98, 99, 102
Utopia, 174, 184
Victoria and Albert Museum, 33, 101
Volodmyr, 207
Voysey, 239
Walmer House, 215
Walpole, 133, 145, 150, 152, 160
Waterhouse Plantation, 142, 143
Waterhouse Pond, 142, 143
Watling Street, 16, 23
Watts, 50, 120, 129, 134
Weltje, 102
Wembley Brook, 87
Wembley Stadium, 86, 88, 89
Westfield, 52, 221, 232
Westway, 9, 16, 17, 63, 65, 213, 215, 217
Wilberforce, 28, 29, 30, 121, 122
William III, 36, 39, 126
William Morris, 37, 99, 100, 101, 103, 117
Woodland Garden, 143
Worlds End, 176
Wren, 36, 115, 126, 129, 138, 140, 180
WW2 bunker, 214
zeppelin, 188
Zinzendorf, 176, 177
Zulus, 39, 46