

THROUGH GORDON AND WOBURN SQUARES

**A WALK THROUGH
HISTORIC BLOOMSBURY
VISITING THE
NEWLY-RESTORED SQUARES**



University of London

Established by Royal Charter 1836

THROUGH GORDON AND WOBURN SQUARES

This walk takes a north-south stroll through an area famous as the centre of artistic and intellectual activity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the focus of innovative and elegant schemes for residential development in the 17th and 18th centuries.

On the way you will visit squares newly-restored by the University of London. The walk should take about 90 minutes.

Background

Bloomsbury gets its name from the Blemond family who owned the land for part of the 13th century. From them, the manor and its house, were called Blemondsbury. Despite this brief connection, it's their name that has been passed down through the years.

The property eventually passed to the Wriothesly family, later Earls of Southampton (one a patron of Shakespeare), and by marriage to the Russells, Earls, and later Dukes, of Bedford, both family associations remembered in many street names throughout the area. The eighteenth century saw the building of fashionable garden squares, linked by streets of elegant terraces not only in Bloomsbury, but in Belgravia and Mayfair. *For general and access information about the locations described, please refer to the back of this leaflet.*

► *Begin the walk on the pavement in front of King's Cross station.*

1. King's Cross

The name comes from an unloved monument to King George IV put up in 1836 at the crossroads of the Euston, Pentonville, Pancras and Gray's Inn Roads, but taken down again by 1845. The station was built in

1851-2, by Lewis Cubitt as the terminus for the Great Northern Railway.

► *Use the subway to cross over Euston Road and walk towards St Pancras Station.*

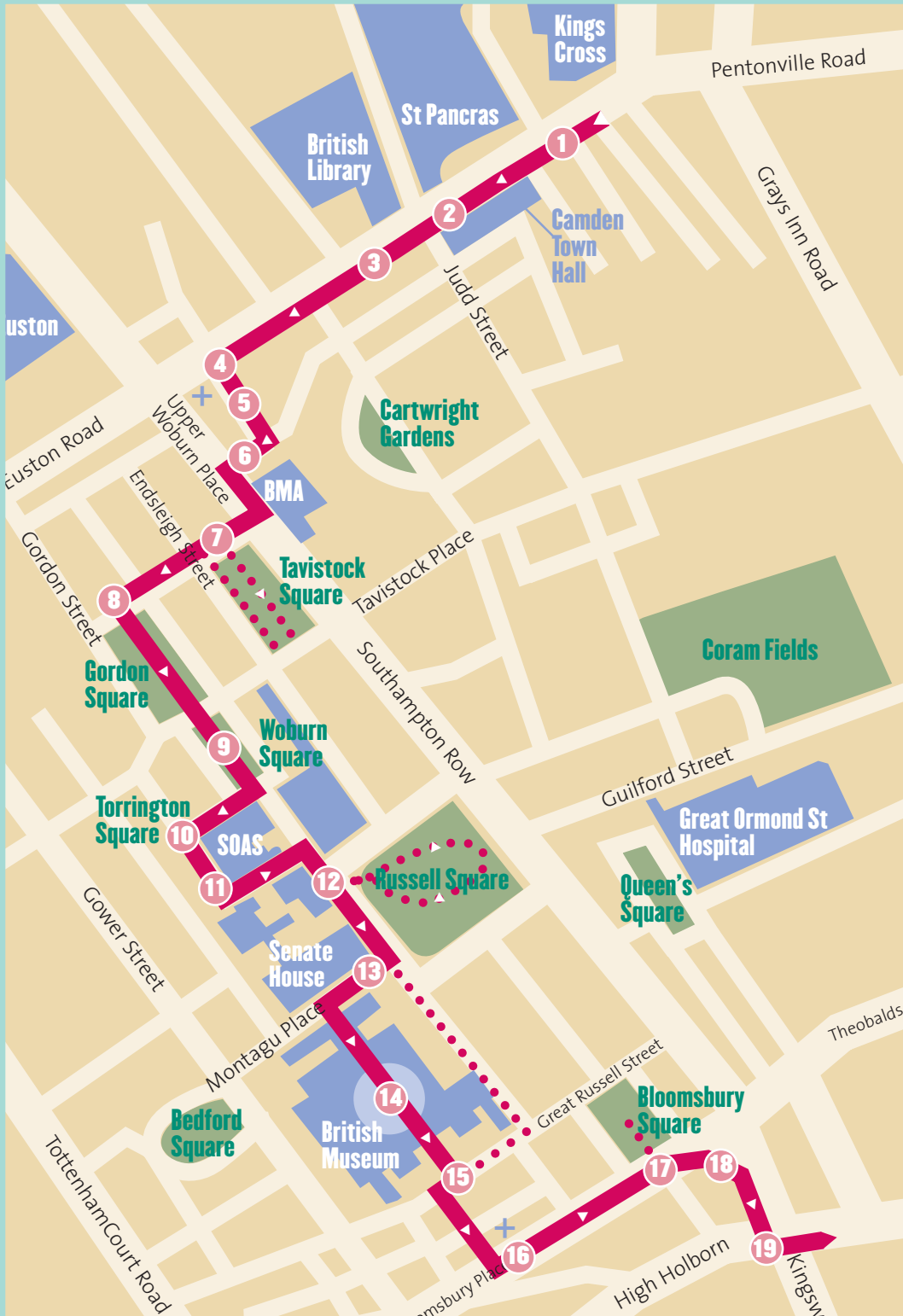
2. St Pancras Station and Hotel

Behind the hotel building which faces you, is the original station, built by the Midland Railway in 1866-8, a masterpiece of Victorian engineering, with a trainshed spanning 240 feet and soaring 100 feet above the rails at its apex.

The Victorian Gothic hotel was added in 1873-6 after a competition won by Sir George Gilbert Scott, albeit with the most expensive tender. It had (and still has) the grandest of staircases, and a smoking room for female guests, the first in London, but it had surprisingly few bathrooms and was heated by open coal fires. The hotel closed in 1935, proving impossible to upgrade. Attempts to demolish it in the 1960s were foiled by Sir John Betjeman and others, and it became a protected, though empty, building without a fire certificate. Now the station and the hotel are part of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link project, the focus of the planned regeneration of the whole KingsCross area. The station is due to re-



Vaulted ceiling of Grand Staircase in St Pancras Chambers



Kings Cross

Pentonville Road

St Pancras

British Library

Camden Town Hall

Grays Inn Road

Euston

Judd Street

Cartwright Gardens

BMA

Upper Woburn Place

Tavistock Square

Tavistock Place

Coram Fields

Gordon Square

Woburn Square

Guilford Street

Great Ormond St Hospital

Torrington Square

SOAS

Russell Square

Queen's Square

Gower Street

Senate House

Theobalds

Bedford Square

British Museum

Bloomsbury Square

Tottenham Court Road

Montagu Place

14

Great Russell Street

Russell Square

High Holborn

19

Kingsway

open in November 2007, and the hotel is to be refurbished, with the upper part of the building converted into apartments.

► *Walk beyond St Pancras until you are facing the red brick British Library. If you have time, cross over and visit.*

3. British Library

In 1998 the British Library moved to this new building designed by Colin St John Wilson and Partners. It had previously been housed inside and underneath the British Museum, but both institutions needed extra space. Involving the largest known excavation of

London clay, this building has 4 floors of storage below ground level. The new Library offers free exhibition galleries displaying some of the most important books and manuscripts from its collections as well as a bookshop and cafés

Café • Disabled parking

► *Continue ahead until Dukes Place.*

4. St Pancras New Church

Completed in 1822, and the most expensive church of its time. Designed by Bloomsbury locals William Inwood and son Henry, who had returned from Greece with sketches of

THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON IN BLOOMSBURY

The University of London, England's third oldest university, was granted its first charter in 1836 though many of its constituent institutions are older than this.

For example, the founding colleges, University College, London and King's College, London were founded in 1827 and 1829 respectively, while St Bartholomew's Hospital Medical School and St Thomas' Hospital Medical School both have twelfth century origins.

After 1858 its degrees were made accessible to any candidate in the UK, and the birth of distance learning began an expansion of the University's role as the 'teaching university'. From its earliest days, the University has been a pioneering force in higher education, introducing many new subjects into university education.

Degrees were proudly awarded to all students who passed the exams regardless of religious or social background.

By 1880 the University of London had become the first University in the country to award degrees to women. By 1908, the University had over 4000 students thus becoming the largest university in

the UK and the fifth largest in the world.

The university existed for its first hundred years in temporary accommodation in various locations around London, including Somerset House and south Kensington. Selection of the permanent site for the University was subject to years of drawn-out debate, until Bloomsbury was chosen in the 1920s, beginning with the building of Senate House. (*stop 10*)

During the Second World War the University was dispersed around the country and Senate House was requisitioned by the government. Post-war expansion of university education in the UK saw the number of internal students at the University of London rise to almost 54,000 by 1981.

The 1980s was a period of amalgamation, and the formation of large multi-faculty colleges, like Queen Mary College, some of these new institutions as large if not larger than other UK universities.

Today the University continues to be a family of world-class institutions, collectively upholding its international reputation for teaching and research, with its degrees recognised for quality and excellence.

the temple of the Erechtheum on the Acropolis. The Coade Stone caryatids (female figures) seen on either side of the church had to be cut at the waist to fit, as they were originally made too tall.

➤ *Walk down Dukes Road towards Woburn Walk, passing by The Place.*

5. The Place

One of London's leading contemporary dance venues, The Place was founded in 1969. The original building dates from 1889 and was the home of the 20th Middlesex Artists Rifle Volunteers, whose ranks included artists William Morris and Holman Hunt.

Café

➤ *Turn right into Woburn Walk*

6. Woburn Walk

With its distinctive bow-fronted shops and original paving this short passage is often used as a film set. It was designed by Thomas Cubitt, older brother of the Kings Cross station architect, in 1822. The poet and dramatist W B Yeats lived at no 5 – look out for the blue plaque.

➤ *Turn left into Upper Woburn Place, and walk down to Tavistock Square. Cross the road at the traffic lights to the Square. If open, you can walk around the gardens. Enter and leave by the gate on this side.*

7. Tavistock Square

Also designed by Thomas Cubitt, the original façade can still be seen on the west side of the Square. On the east side is Tavistock House, designed by Edwin Lutyens in 1929, now the British Medical Association's HQ. An older property on this site was the London home of Charles Dickens from 1851-60 and where he wrote *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), and *Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

The Square's garden has a 'monument to

THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP: 'LIVED IN SQUARES, LOVED IN TRIANGLES ...'

A loose association of writers, artists and intellectuals, first named so in 1910, many of them followers of G E Moore, a Cambridge philosopher who argued for 'the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects.'

Among its more famous members were Virginia and Leonard Woolf, her sister Vanessa Bell, artists Duncan Grant, Clive Bell, Dora Carrington, writers Lytton Strachey and E M Forster, economist J M Keynes – many of whom lived along the route of this walk.

They promoted the avant-garde in art and literature, followed a bohemian lifestyle, and attracted attention over their sometimes unconventional love lives.

You can read more about the Bloomsbury Group on the information board in Gordon Square Garden.

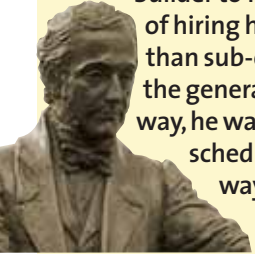
the conscientious objector', unveiled in 1994 by composer Michael Tippett and centrally a seated bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi, by Fredda Brilliant, and mounted on a shrine-like plinth in whose recess can often be found flowers and other tokens.

In the south west is a recent bust of Virginia Woolf, who with her husband Leonard, was a leading light of the Bloomsbury Group (see panel above) and a resident at no 52 between 1924 and 1939 (now demolished for the Tavistock Hotel). Mohammed Ali Abbas, one of the founders of Pakistan, lived at no 33.

➤ *Continue through Endsleigh Place to Gordon Square. If the garden is open, cross to the gate and walk through to the kiosk at the far end, otherwise turn left and walk around the Square towards Woburn Square.*

THOMAS CUBITT

On this walk, you pass by many terraces of Georgian houses built by Thomas Cubitt (1788-1855), London's leading master builder in the early nineteenth century. Son of a Norfolk farmer, he became a skilled carpenter, and then began his own building firm in Grays Inn Road. He was the first builder to follow the modern system of hiring his own workers, rather than sub-contracting which was the general rule in his time. In this way, he was able to control costs, schedules and standards in a way that brought him to the attention of the major



developers of the new London estates, like the Grosvenors in the West End, and here in Bloomsbury, the Bedford Estate. His work can be seen in other parts of London, particularly in Belgravia, Pimlico, Camden Town, Highbury and Stoke Newington.

He worked on the east front of Buckingham Palace, and was chosen to build Osborne House, Queen Victoria's Isle of Wight retreat. At his death, she said of him 'a better, kindhearted or more simple, unassuming man never breathed.' His younger brother Lewis worked with him as architect, notably of King's Cross station, and his other brother William was also a builder, responsible for Cubitt Town on the Isle of Dogs.

8. Gordon Square

Thomas Cubitt began building the houses around Gordon Square in the 1820s and they were completed after his death in the 1850s. The 6th Duke of Bedford personally designed and supervised the layout and planting of the garden. The Duke named the square after his second wife, Lady Georgiana Gordon.

This square became the focus of the Bloomsbury Group (see panel on page 5). Number 46 was the home of the Stephen family, including Vanessa (Bell), sister Virginia (Woolf), and brothers. Vanessa Bell moved to no 50 in 1920 with her family, and then from 1925 she and Clive Bell lived at no 39. Clive Bell's cousin Lytton Strachey lived at no 51 before 1919, and then he and members of his family lived at no 41 Gordon Square from 1919-1956. Dora Carrington, artist and lifelong friend of Strachey also lived there from 1920-1923.

The gardens in Gordon Square and Woburn Square were purchased from the Bedford Estate in 1951. By that time, many of the surrounding terraced houses were

owned by the University, and today house academic activities of colleges of the University.

The 2006 restoration of the garden by the University of London involved extensive tree work, new paths and planting, and the reintroduction of perimeter railings reproducing the originals removed in the

GORDON SQUARE GARDENS

Gordon Square has a wide variety of shrubs planted around its perimeter under the mature plane trees, and in the south west quarter has a well established area of woodland ground flora, including bluebells, cow parsley and dog violets.

The gardens are managed to encourage a variety of wildlife – birds, butterflies, mammals and insects – by ensuring that some areas around the perimeter are relatively undisturbed, including areas of wild flowers and shrubbery. Ivy will be allowed to grow up some of the trees for wildlife habitats.

Look out for the information board in the Garden.

Second World War so that the iron could be re-used in the war effort. The old gardener's hut has been restored for use as a cafe.

➤ *Leave by the gate near the cafe, and cross via the pedestrian crossing to Woburn Square. If the garden is open, walk through, otherwise turn left and then right into the Square, and walk towards the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the far end.*

9. Woburn Square

Woburn Square was named after the Duke's family seat, Woburn Abbey, in Bedfordshire. The houses here, built between 1829 and 1847, were narrower and less imposing than the houses on Gordon Square and hence produced lower rents.

No 15 still has link snuffers in the wrought iron arch above its steps: these were used by the link boys to extinguish their torches. On this side too, was Christ Church, demolished in the late 1960s to make way for the Institute of Education building designed by Sir Denys Lasdun (the architect of the Royal National Theatre on the South Bank).

The additional construction by 1974 of the SOAS extension, also by Lasdun, removed a further section of the square.

The garden has been renovated by the University of London including new railings as in Gordon Square, and the restoration of the summerhouse. In the Garden is displayed 'The Green Man', sculpted by Lydia Kapinska (1999) inspired by words of Virginia Woolf. A display panel nearby gives more information.

➤ *At the end of Woburn Square turn right along the walkway to Torrington Square. Turn left.*

10. Senate House

Ahead of you, over the rooftops is the tower of Senate House, the University of London's HQ, built 1927-1936 by Charles Holden, who

also famously designed stations on the London Underground. It was requisitioned by government to house the Ministry of Information in the Second World War. Graham Greene, John Betjeman and Dylan Thomas worked here during the War and it became a model for George Orwell's 'Ministry of Truth' in his novel *1984*. It is said that Hitler had selected the building as a post-invasion London HQ, and so allegedly



Woburn Square in the late 1960s, showing Christ Church before demolition

Bloomsbury was spared heavy bombing. In fact the roof was used as a valuable observation point for the Royal Observatory Corps. The main entrance is in Malet Street.

11. Torrington Square

Originally the site of archery target grounds in 1805, today this is a 'square' in name only, most of its original houses having been demolished and now surrounded by University buildings. Completely remodelled by the University in 2005 as a piazza with the brand new extension to Birkbeck College opening on to it, the scheme was designed by Robert Myers Associates and received the Landscape Institute Award for 2006.

► *Turn left, passing the Brunei Gallery and then through the gates, turn right into Russell Square. Either walk on and turn right to the next stop (14) in Montague Place, or turn left to the pedestrian crossing for a circular detour around the gardens of Russell Square. If you visit the gardens, return to this point to rejoin the walk.*

12. Russell Square cab shelter

As you cross to the gardens, note the green painted cabin standing on the roadway. This is one of London's few remaining cabman's shelters, originally established by a charity (still existing) to supply refreshment, strictly non-alcoholic, to drivers of the horse-drawn cabs. This one originally stood in Leicester Square, is still in operation and is a listed building. ► *Enter the gate and turn left on the path towards the cafe, and return to the gate via the central water feature.*

13. Russell Square

London's second largest garden square after Lincoln's Inn Fields. On the far side you can see the extravagant French Gothic redbrick and terracotta façade of the Hotel Russell first opened in 1900.



Visitors to the British Museum in its former home in Montague House

The gardens have recently been replanted to reflect the way they were first laid out in 1800 by Humphrey Repton, with the addition of a fountain water feature at its centre. Beyond this is the bronze statue of Francis, 5th Duke of Bedford, who began the development of Bloomsbury.

Café

► *Cross back and turn left down to the corner of Montague Place*

14. Montague Place

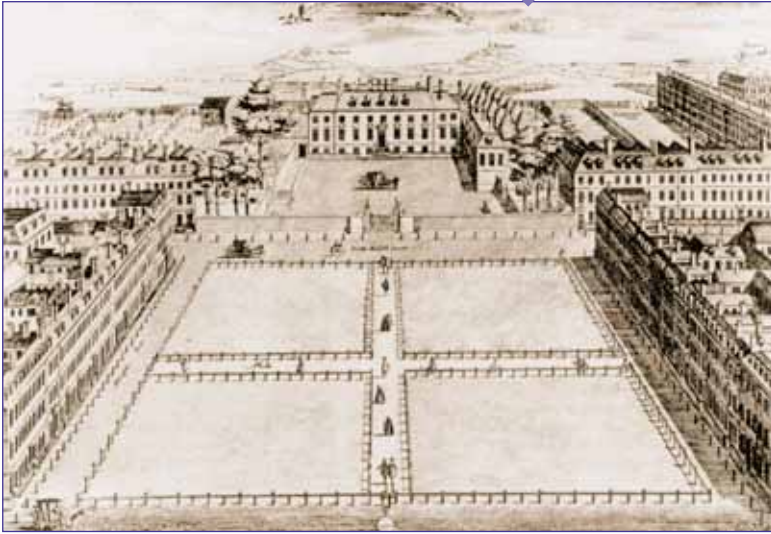
This is named after Ralph, 1st Duke of Montagu, whose mansion, Montague House (rebuilt after a fire in 1686) was sold in 1755 to house the British Museum, which had been founded two years earlier. Montague House was demolished to make way for the current British Museum buildings, designed by Sir Robert Smirke and built between 1823 and 1847.

► *If the British Museum is open, walk along Montague Place to the North Entrance and follow the signs via the Wellcome Gallery to the Great Court. There are lifts if you wish to avoid stairs. If the Museum is closed, then continue along Russell Square to Great Russell Street to resume at stop 16.*

15. British Museum Great Court

The British Museum was established by Act of Parliament in 1753, with Sir Hans Soane's bequest of his natural history collection, books, manuscripts, prints, drawings and coins. It opened in 1759, for three hours a day to the few people who had been granted tickets. In 1757 George II donated his 12,000 volume library including volumes collected by every monarch since Henry VIII. The 1801 defeat of Napoleon in the Egyptian Campaign brought the Rosetta Stone and the Elgin Marbles.

In 1854 Sidney Smirke, brother of the museum's original architect, built the circular Reading Room whose contents were



Bloomsbury Square in 1754 looking towards Southampton (later Bedford) House with open countryside beyond

removed in 1998 to the new British Library in Euston Road (see stop 3) while the Great Court got its glass roof, designed by Lord Foster, in 2000.

The 1972 Tutankhamun Exhibition attracted a record 1,694,117 visitors.

Café • Disabled Parking

► *From the Great Court you can visit the Reading Room and the recently-restored King's Library, before leaving the museum by the main entrance and crossing the forecourt to Great Russell Street*

16. Great Russell Street

Believe it or not, in the 17th century, this area was renowned for gardens with peach trees, and in the 18th century there were some very grand houses here. In 1801, no 62 was smallpox vaccine pioneer Edward Jenner's Bloomsbury Dispensary and in 1862 no 59 was the first London office of temperance travel man Thomas Cook.

► *Cross Great Russell Street to Museum Street, and follow this to Bloomsbury Way. Turn left to St George's church*

17. St George's, Bloomsbury

Designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor, and

completed in 1731, after the residents of the parish of St-Giles-in-the-Fields complained that to get to church they had to go through the Rookery, an ill-famed area later depicted by Hogarth in his engraving *Gin Lane* (1751). Notice the classical portico and the stepped tower which Hawksmoor based on Pliny's description of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. The statue at the top of the steeple is of George 1 donated by the royal brewer, William Hicks. This is said to be the only statue of him in London. In 1913 Emily Davidson, the suffragette who was killed by the king's horse at Epsom was buried here.

► *Continue along Bloomsbury Way to Bloomsbury Square. If open, you can make a tour of the Square's garden returning to this point to resume the walk.*

18. Bloomsbury Square

Laid out by the Earl of Southampton in the 1660s and originally called Southampton Square this was the first space in the capital to be called 'a square'. On the north side was the grand Southampton House with gardens behind extending to present day Russell Square (see stop 13). On east and west sides were terraces of large houses

occupied by wealthy residents. South of the Square were the tradesmen and markets to serve them. None of these buildings remain.

At no 29 lived Lord Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice whose house was attacked and destroyed by Gordon Rioters, June 1780. This event features in *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens' novel about the Riots.

On that site now is Victoria House, completed 1932, and considered as a possible HQ for the Mayor of London, until City Hall was built at Tower Bridge.

The gardens were designed by Humphrey Repton with Westmacotts' 1816 statue of Charles James Fox gazing up Bedford Place to the statue of the 5th Duke that we saw in Russell Square. In the centre is a new plaque which records diarist John Evelyn's 1665 description of the area as 'a noble square or piazza and a little town'.

► *Cross Bloomsbury Way to Sicilian Avenue.*

20. Sicilian Avenue

A charming little architectural eccentricity of 1905, said to be paved in Sicilian limestone.

► *Walk along the Avenue and turn right into Southampton Row, finishing the tour at Holborn tube station in Kingsway.*

21. Kingsway

This 100 foot wide road was planned from 1892 onwards as part of a huge Victorian improvement scheme which also included New Oxford Street, Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road. It was named in honour of King Edward VII who opened it in 1905 and included a tram subway to the Embankment, which was closed in 1952 and the southern end of which was re-opened as a traffic underpass in 1964.

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Thanks to Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre for permission to use illustrative material.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover: Gordon Square, 1937, and p7: Woburn Square pre-1960s, courtesy of the City of London, London Metropolitan Archives.

Cover: Summerhouse, Woburn Square, 2007, and p2: St Pancras grand staircase 2005, John Finn.

p6: Thomas Cubitt, by James Gray

p8: Montague House, p9: Bloomsbury Square, courtesy of Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY

The University of London is a federal university and is one of the oldest, largest and most diverse universities in the UK. Established by Royal Charter in 1836, the University is recognised globally as a world leader in higher education.

It consists of 19 self-governing colleges of outstanding reputation, together with the prestigious institutes of the School of Advanced Study and a number of other central academic activities.

The University has a very diverse student population of over 125,000 students, with a further 34,000 students studying by distance learning on the University's External Programme.

We have an outstanding international reputation for the quality of the teaching and research at our colleges and institutes. Whatever you want to study, we offer virtually every subject covered in any university curriculum.

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If you are unable to come to London to study because of work or personal commitments, the University of London External Programme offers a flexible way to study wherever you are in the world.

The University has a Central Administration which supports the federal University and the central activities covering academic matters, finance, human resources, governance, and the estate administration.

For first enquiries about the University, contact the Information Centre, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8360/8361/8363

E-mail: enquiries@london.ac.uk

If you would like to request a *Guide to the Colleges and Institutes of the University of London*, please provide your full postal address.

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON CONFERENCE FACILITIES

The location of the University's buildings makes them ideal for conference and meetings.

Conference and Catering staff are on site to assist.

For more information on hiring fees, availability and other matters, please contact the Conference Office.

Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8127/8128

Access times and further information

Gordon Square and Woburn Square:

open daily between 08.00-20.00 or dusk (not Christmas Day)

Tavistock Square: open daily, daylight hours only; **Bloomsbury Square:** open daily, daylight hours only; **Russell Square:** open daily, 07.30-22.00 Information from www.camden.gov.uk

British Library: free admission to galleries, open daily, times vary. www.bl.uk

British Museum: free admission, open daily, until 17.30, and until 23.00 on some days. www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

Safety note

This walk crosses several busy roads, so please take care and always try to use pedestrian crossings where you can.

Want to find out more?

The Streets of Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia, published by the Camden History Society, gives a detailed history of this area, with many illustrations and is available from the Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre, Holborn Library, Theobalds Road, WC2 www.camden.gov.uk

This walk follows part of the Jubilee Walk through a large area of Central London. More details on www.jubileewalkway.com

Download this booklet

from www.london.ac.uk/heritagewalk



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