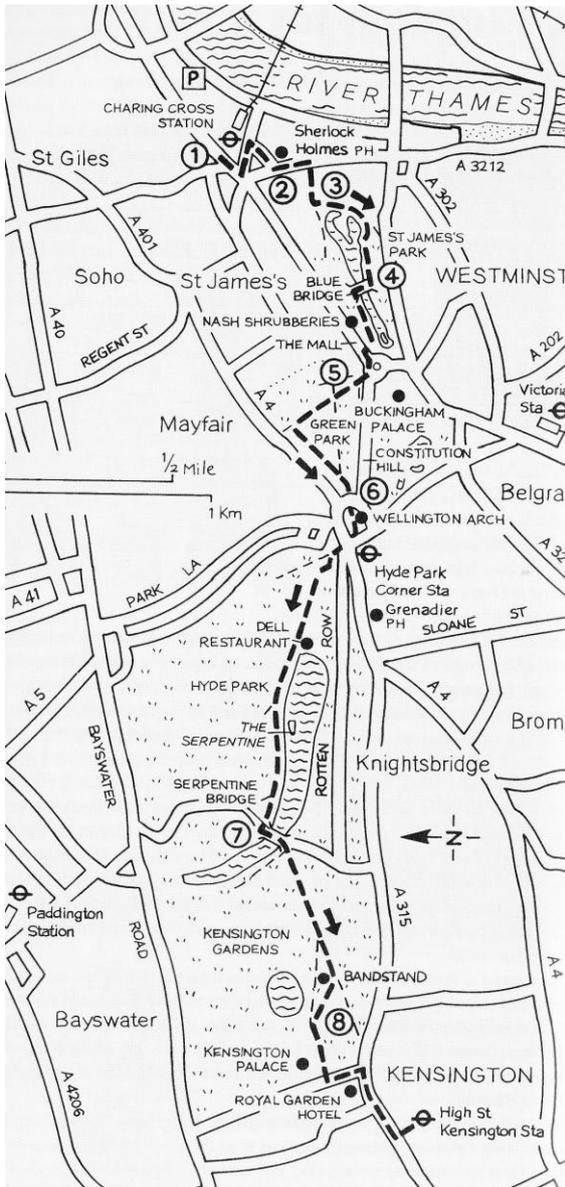


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Explore London Group 6

The Royal Parks.



A linear walk from St James's Park to Kensington Gardens, St James's Park is the oldest of the Royal Parks. Charles II created the park to look as much like Versailles as possible. In contrast, Green Park has no flower beds to add colour to this small Park. In Hyde Park there are lime trees, rose gardens and the Serpentine. Kensington Gardens is on the other side of the Serpentine Bridge and contains Kensington Palace.

St James's Park is the oldest Royal Park in London and is surrounded by three palaces. The most ancient is Westminster, which has now become the Houses of Parliament, St James's Palace and of course, the best known, Buckingham Palace.

The Park was once a marshy watermeadow. In the thirteenth century a leper hospital was founded, and it is from this hospital that the Park took its name. In 1532 Henry VIII acquired the site as yet another deer park and built the Palace of St James's. James I, improved the drainage and controlled the water supply. A road was created in front of St James's Palace, approximately where the Mall is today, but it was Charles II who made dramatic changes. The Park was redesigned, with avenues of trees planted and lawns laid. The King opened the park to the public and

was a frequent visitor, feeding the ducks and mingling with his subjects.

Horse Guards Parade was created by filling in one end of the long canal and was used first as a mustering ground and later for parades. The Park changed forever when John Nash redesigned it in a more romantic style. The canal was transformed into a natural-looking lake.

Buckingham Palace George III bought Buckingham House in 1761 for his wife Queen Charlotte to use as a comfortable family home close to St James's Palace, where many court functions were held. Buckingham House became known as the Queen's House, and 14 of George III's 15 children were born there. In 1762 work began on remodelling the house to the King's requirements, to designs by Sir William Chambers, at a cost of £73,000. George IV, on his accession in 1820, decided to reconstruct the house into a pied-à-terre, using it for the same purpose as his father George III. With the assistance of his architect, John Nash, he set about transforming the house into a palace. Nash retained the main block but doubled its size by adding a new suite of rooms on the garden side facing west. Faced with mellow Bath stone, the external style reflected the French neo-classical influence favoured by George IV.

The Green Park covers 40 acres and is an important link between St James's Park and Hyde Park in forming a chain of open spaces that contribute so much to life in the capital. The Park was first recorded in 1554 when Sir Thomas Wyatt led a rebellion in protest against the marriage of Mary I to Philip II of Spain. The area was meadowland used for hunting and the occasional duel.

The Park was enclosed by Charles II in 1668, stocked with deer and provided with a ranger's house. It was known as Upper St James's Park but by 1746 it was called The Green Park. Various improvements at the beginning of the 18th century made it more of a pleasure garden. The Tyburn Pool was built, and in the 1720s a reservoir was made to supply water to St James's Palace and Buckingham House.

Hyde Park is one of London's finest landscapes and covers over 350 acres. Henry VIII acquired Hyde Park from the monks of Westminster Abbey in 1534. It remained a private hunting ground until James I came to the throne and permitted limited access. It was Charles I who changed the nature of the park completely. He had the Ring (north of the present Serpentine boathouses) created and in 1637 opened the park to the general public.

In 1665, the year of the Great Plague, many citizens of London fled the City to camp on Hyde Park, in the hope of escaping the disease. Towards the end of the 17th century William III moved his court to Kensington Palace. He found that his walk to St James's was very dangerous, so he had 300 oil lamps installed, creating the first artificially lit highway in the country. This route later became known as Rotten Row, which is a corruption of the French 'Route de Roi' or King's Road.

Queen Caroline, wife of George II, had extensive renovations carried out and in the 1730s had The Serpentine, a lake of some 11.34 hectares, created. In 1851 during Queen Victoria's reign, the Great Exhibition was held and in 1977 a Silver Jubilee Exhibition was held in honour of Queen Elizabeth II's 25 years on the throne. Since 1872, people have been allowed to speak at Speaker's Corner on any subject they want to. The Lido was set up by George Lansbury, the first Commissioner of Works, in 1930 and in warm weather is used for sunbathing and swimming.

Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain. This unique Memorial to Diana, Princess of Wales was opened by Her Majesty The Queen on 6th July 2004.

Kensington Palace, When William III (1689-1702) and Mary II (1689-94) came to the throne, the sovereign's principal London residence was Whitehall Palace. For purposes of

state and ceremony, it remained the official centre of the court during their reign, but neither the King nor the Queen enjoyed the thought of living there. William suffered from chronic asthma and the damp riverside location of Whitehall threatened to weaken his already delicate health. In the summer of 1689 William and Mary purchased Nottingham House, a Jacobean mansion built about 1605. It stood in Kensington, a village that 'esteem'd a very good Air'.