

Holborn and Bloomsbury

- **Maps:** try www.streetmap.co.uk or otherwise the London A-Z
- **Nearest tubes:** Embankment, Temple, Chancery Lane, Holborn, Russell Square and Covent Garden
- **Distance:** around five miles
- **Difficulty:** easy to moderate
- **Refreshments:** there are take-away sandwich shops, cafés, coffee bars and restaurants everywhere along this walk - perhaps concentrated most heavily at High Holborn and Grays Inn Road.
- **Toilets:** Russell Square or the British Museum

Introduction: This walk properly starts at Temple Tube station, although anyone who finds Waterloo more convenient can cross the river on the new Hungerford pedestrian footbridge, started in 1999 as a Millennium project and recently opened. The new bridge is a 320-metre "cable stay footbridge" which straddles the old railway bridge. Hopefully it will restore the marvellous views of the old footbridge downriver towards the City and Canary Wharf without replicating the puddles and the crush at rush hour. The new bridge is a wide, stylish and thankfully stable structure guaranteed to put you in the mood for promenading.

Walkers coming across the river should turn right along the Embankment and pass Somerset House and the Victoria Embankment Gardens to reach Temple Tube. In fact, a chance to visit the gardens should never be overlooked as it is such a lovely spot, especially for anyone with the slightest interest in gardening. Somewhere nearby beats the heart of a gardener with a true affinity for old-fashioned formal bedding schemes, the sort you used to see in every town park, now becoming sadly unfashionable. They are done with such style that you really should pop in and have a look if the season is right. There are also exemplary mature herbaceous borders, trees, statuary, refreshments, occasional entertainment, travelling art exhibitions and benches to sit on while you admire it all. Recommended.

Somerset House is also of some interest; a former Tudor palace, it was rebuilt in 1775 to reflect the splendour of the nation to a design by Sir William Chambers. It now hosts a wide programme of events and exhibitions and even, on occasion, an ice rink. But to start the walk, turn right off the Embankment at Temple Tube; if leaving the station you should also turn right and climb up the steps in front of you. Cross to reach Arundel Street which takes you onto The Strand. Turn right. (Alternatively, if feeling adventurous, turn right up Maltravers Street, passing a pub called the Cheshire Cheese, and cut through the network of small streets and alleys for an experience one walker of this route has likened to exploring the Marais in Paris.) Across the road is Australia House and St Clement Danes church, beyond them the wedding-cake Gothic buildings of the Royal Courts of Justice. We're about to brush against legal London, also passing a famous inn, the Wig and Pen. While walking down the Strand, if in need of cash, the branch of Lloyds is recommended, for it has cash tills situated in the most gorgeously decorated lobby imaginable.

Continue down The Strand until you reach a pedestrian crossing, use it, turning left into Chancery Lane. Before you do, cast a look over your right shoulder into Fleet Street, a sad shadow of its former self these days. Chancery Lane, at the heart of legal London, retains a strong flavour of the mediaeval city with its twists and turns, and the half-timbered buildings in evidence in this district. It's a strange mixture of ancient and modern, and contains everything the gentleman at law could require including tailors, shirtmakers, purveyors of tasteful cufflinks and wholesale wine merchants. Watch out for the Law Society headquarters, Cliffords Inn, the tribunals building and the London Silver Vaults - our landmark to take a right turn at Southampton Buildings for a short-cut to High

Holborn. Follow the road round past an office block with severe topiary outside until it emerges near Chancery Lane tube. Cross the road, using the Tube entrance as a pedestrian subway if necessary, and go straight on along Grays Inn Road.

Grays Inn, to your left, is one of the four Inns of Court, or institutions empowered to call men and women to the Bar. It is managed by the Honourable Society of Grays Inn and many legal practitioners are based within its walls. Its dark brick exterior dominates the bottom of Grays Inn Road, but the gloom is relieved by a row of London Plane trees which give the street a wonderfully leafy prospect. There is a seemingly endless choice of refreshment opportunities here, but one not to be missed if you have a sweet tooth is Konditor and Cook bespoke cake makers, across the road from the Inn.

After passing the Grays Inn buildings, you reach a major road junction. Leave Grays Inn Road here, turning left into Theobalds Road. On your left, as you continue along the boundary of Grays Inn, is a delightful secret - Grays Inn Gardens, also known as The Walks. Although not normally open to the public, they are accessible on weekdays between approximately 12pm and 2.30pm and are a great favourite with office workers wanting a pleasant spot for lunch. The gardens were laid out in the 1600s by Francis Bacon and are a must-visit if open. The entrance is hard to spot on this side, but just follow the iron railings until you are opposite the entrance to Holborn Library on the other side of the road. You will see a tiny door in the wall - go through it, along a small, almost tunnel-like passage through the undergrowth and you are in the grounds. Walk to the far end, through the 1723 gates, and you might take the opportunity to stroll round and see a little of the Inn buildings themselves.

Return to the Theobalds Road entrance and turn right, continuing the walk. A glance down Bedford Row on your left gives a glimpse of ordered, leafy splendour and elegant Georgian buildings. Shortly afterwards comes Red Lion Street, a pleasant road full of restaurants and small shops which is beautifully quiet compared with nearby High Holborn. It is also curiously reminiscent of some districts of Paris. Turn left here and continue until you reach Lamb's Conduit Passage on the right, which brings you out into Red Lion Square, another small and pleasant formal garden with benches to rest on. The square is home to the Conway Hall humanist centre and Bertrand Russell's bust is in the gardens. After pausing here, continue straight on across the junction with Proctor Street, crossing this busy road and picking up Fisher Street on the far side. Another short and peaceful interlude before you emerge onto busy Southampton Row and turn right.

Passing the Central St Martin's College of Art and Design, the legacy of a merger between two of London's most famous art schools, and the Cochrane Theatre, use the pedestrian crossings to get across the end of Theobalds Road - think of the crowds you have missed with your peaceful detour. Continue along this quieter section of Southampton Row, by now beginning to resemble Bloomsbury, and also joining the rambling hotel district that populates the whole area. Glance into Bloomsbury Place for another flavour of the district. At the top of Southampton Row is Russell Square, home these days very largely to outposts of the University of London. Shortly you will cross to the centre of the Square and, if possible, cut into the gardens, but before you do, we should stop off and look into Cosmo Place and Queen's Square.

After passing Bloomsbury Place, keep your eyes open for the tiny passageway into Cosmo Place on the other side of the road. A short walk down this little passageway, with its shops and restaurants, and you will be in Queen's Square. Here is St George the Martyr Church, a row of old-fashioned red telephone boxes which greatly add to the ambience and the gorgeous gardens - actually used by people from the neighbourhood and not just by lunching office workers. The square is named for Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, and mother of 15 children. Inside the gardens, there is a statue dedicated to her that was originally thought to have been of Queen Anne. There's a bed of formal

shrubs, roses and palms in pots, a bird bath (well-used by pigeons) and the most lovely memorial cat sculpture which you can try to discover for yourself. Next to the gardens is the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital. Also nearby is the Mary Ward Centre, an adult education college originally founded by a Victorian novelist and philanthropist, and the October Gallery, dedicated to artists doing avant-garde, cross-cultural work.

Russell Square, one of London's grandest Georgian squares, has recently been extensively refurbished with the help of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. Walking past while the work was going on was heartbreaking, as it was full of bulldozers and mud. Now it is open again and the signs are good, with borders, grass and gravelled paths having been born out of the mess. There is plenty of room to sit around, in less formal surroundings than in some of the gardens we visit on this walk, and there is a cafe. The whole area is very popular with students but is perhaps not best visited later in the evening, due to a reputation for after-dark licentiousness. Having passed into the garden, turn left to walk along the path behind the Duke of Bedford's huge and somewhat Roman statue overlooking Bedford place, and pass out of the gates again.

Using the pedestrian crossing, cross over into Montague Street, and walk along the side of the British Museum until you reach Great Russell Street. Turning right takes you to the museum, which could occupy you for hours if you have them handy; if not you might like to look at the capsule visit section elsewhere on this site. The walk continues left off Great Russell Street and along Museum Street, where a little careful navigation is required to get you across the New Oxford Street junction and onto the second leg of Museum Street. Carry straight on again to cross the end of High Holborn, pass the entrance to Stukeley Street and Shorts Gardens, and turn down Betterton Street which should be on the right. You will notice a definite change in atmosphere as we leave Bloomsbury and head towards Covent Garden. In this area is the City Lit, a popular adult learning institution familiar to all Londoners with a love of evening classes.

At the end of Betterton Street, turn left into Endell Street, which becomes Bow Street, and now you are firmly in Covent Garden. Walk straight across the junction with Long Acre, passing to the left of the mini-roundabout. On your left is the infamous Bow Street Magistrates Court, on your right the Royal Opera House. Walk along Bow Street until it becomes Wellington Street and to the right you will see the entrance into Covent Garden market with its famous street life and entertainers. Also here is the London Transport Museum which has a shop in which it is possible to purchase nearly anything you can think of with a Tube logo on it.

Now Covent Garden is becoming the West End, with the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, the Lyceum Theatre and the Strand Theatre all in evidence. Turn left into Exeter Street, which brings you out onto Aldwych. The curve of the street is crossed by the Kingsway; continue across and along the curve of Aldwych to join The Strand. Just before it becomes Fleet Street, we leave it to turn right down Arundel Street, crossing carefully at the end, descending the steps and disappearing back into the bowels of Temple tube.