

## Exploring London's Gas Lights

It's not widely known, but there are still about 1,500 gas lamps operating in London. The lamps burn a tiny pilot light continuously, but at dusk the timers fitted move a lever, which opens a valve to open the gas supply, which lights up the mantles. Although they do not need lighting every night, the timers need adjusting every **fortnight** to allow for changing daylight hours. In addition the mechanisms need to be wound and checked, the glass polished and the mantles replaced. This is the work of a team of five engineers from British Gas.

Survival of the gas lamps is also a tribute to English Heritage, which has protected and restored them. When a lorry drives into a lamp it is re-cast and replaced just as it was. The gas lights glow with a soft parchment coloured light, as distinct from the harsh white light generated by the electric fittings that have replaced them.

Some of the gas lights are approaching 200 years old as can often be seen from the royal cipher, the earliest one of which is "GR IV" from George 4<sup>th</sup>, king from 1820 – 1830. The most recent lamps were installed near to the Queen Mother statue which was dedicated in 2009.



This 7 km walk around central London starts at the post office in Eccleston Place SW1, near to Victoria Station. As well as visiting many familiar tourist sites, the walk highlights a wide variety of gas lamps.

*From the post office cross Eccleston Place and walk along Eccleston Street to the next junction, where you turn left along Buckingham Palace Road. Continue along the left side, crossing several roads. You reach the "Bag O' Nails" pub, where you cross Lower Grosvenor Place. Continue a few yards to*

*the gated entrance to Buckingham Palace Mews, opposite the Rubens Hotel. Each side of the gates, on the Buckingham Palace Road kerbside are our first gas lights.*

These lights have rather special gold tops and are each side of the gated entrance to Buckingham Palace Mews, opposite Rubens Hotel.



Gas lamps by Canada Gate entrance to Green Park, on the palace gateposts, and on the wall of the palace itself...

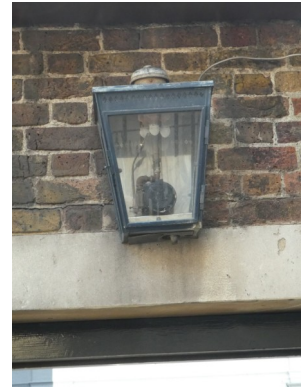




Lights on palace gateposts & security entrances

A little further along Buckingham Palace Road a less elegant gas lamp is visible just inside the public entrance to The Royal Mews, above the gateway.

*Continue along the side of the palace grounds, the road becomes Buckingham Gate. Look out for numerous gas lights visible in the areas of the palace without public access as well as on the gateposts. Walk round to the, usually crowded, front of the palace.*



Inside the Royal Mews

Attractive gold and black gas lamps adorn the security gated entrances on the roadway to the area, and there are lamps on the palace gateposts and on the palace walls. The main palace entrances are surmounted by impressive fittings each comprising five lamps.



*Once you've finished admiring the palace lights go around the Victoria memorial (note the very attractive lights to left of the memorial on the Canada Gate ceremonial entrance to Green Park) and onto the path along the left hand side of The Mall. A few yards along The Mall take the first path to the left.*

This path goes through Green Park. All along the left side are gas lights. But look to your right: the first building you can see is Lancaster House, site of The London Economic Summit Conference, shown on the 31p stamp in 1984. A better



view of the building does not appear available, since there is significant security in this area, perhaps explained as the building next to Lancaster House is Clarence House, official residence of the Prince of Wales.

*If you want to explore this area further, you can continue along the path until you reach a small iron gate on the right, at the end of the low railings, immediately before the railings become much higher. Go through the gate (gas light to your right) and up the steps. The path leads though to the gas lit, Cleveland Row. Note security around the entrance to Stable Yard, this being the way to Clarence House*

*When ready, return to the Mall, the way you came and turn to the left.*







George IV 1820—1830



William IV 1830—1837

There are gas lights all along The Mall on this left side although the right side has electric lighting. As mentioned before, you can often tell the age of the lamps from the royal cipher as shown here.

*Walk about 550m along The Mall to the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Memorial.*

Note the modern gas lights here (image on next page). The memorial to the Queen Mother, who died in 2002 aged 101, was unveiled by HM The Queen in 2009. The Royal family specified that gas lights were to be used. The memorial cost £2M, and was funded by the issue of a £5 coin produced by the

Royal Mint to celebrate the Queen's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. This must have been a better finance option, if you were in the army, than that adopted in 1827, see below.

*Continue another 200m along The Mall to the Duke of York Column. Turn left, noting the gas lights either side at base of the steps, and walk up to the 38m high column.*

When the Duke of York died in 1827 the entire British Army lost one day's wages to pay for the monument, which was completed in 1834. The Duke of York was the second son of King George III, and he was probably the subject of the nursery rhyme. He was commander-in-Chief of the British Army during the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars. His one field command of significance was the Flanders Campaign of 1793–4, which resulted in the heavy defeat at the Battle of Tourcoing (1794), followed by his



British Gas engineer making adjustments to a gas light on The Mall





King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Memorial.



Carlton House Terrace



Duke of York Column

recall to England. Flanders having something of a reputation for being flat, the specific location of the "hill" in the nursery rhyme has been hypothesized to be the town of Cassel which is built on a hill which rises 176 metres (about 570 feet) above the otherwise flat lands of Flanders in northern France.

*Just past the column you come to Carlton House Terrace, explore both left and right as there are very old gas lamps on each side. When you've seen enough proceed along Waterloo Place, going away from the column.*

Immediately in front of you, at the first junction, with Pall Mall, are statues of Florence Nightingale and Sidney Herbert, and the 1861 Guards Crimean War Memorial

*Turn left from Waterloo Place, along Pall Mall. Cross Carlton Gardens and continue to the end of the next building, 100 Pall Mall, now serviced office accommodation.*







This is where in Pall Mall, the first use of gas street lighting in the world was demonstrated, by Frederick Winsor in June 1807. Winsor, originally Friedrich Albrecht Winer, was a German inventor, who became one of the pioneers of gas lighting in Britain. He founded the Gas Light and Coke Company, which grew to eventually be the basis of the North Thames Gas Board, but he returned to France to establish a, less successful, company in Paris, where he died in 1830. A green plaque here by the Institution of Gas Engineers and Managers commemorates the demonstration.

*Retrace your steps and continue along Pall Mall. After about 400m you reach Trafalgar Square. Proceed along the North Side, by the National Gallery.*



There are gas lights at the two exits from the National Gallery. The main entrance is around the corner in St Martin's Place. Other accounts mention other gas lighting in Trafalgar Square, but I have been unable to find any other gas lights, although some electric lights may well be in converted gas fittings.

*Turn left out of Trafalgar Square, and cross St Martin's Place to the Edith Cavell Memorial, after St Martin in the Fields church.*

Edith Cavell was a British nurse from Norfolk. She was matron at Berkendael Medical Institute in Brussels when the First World War broke out in 1914. In addition to nursing soldiers from both sides, she assisted some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium. She was arrested in August 1915, court-martialled, found



guilty of treason, and shot by a German firing squad on 12 October 1915. Her story was used in British propaganda as an example of German barbarism and moral depravity.



Although Cavell's sister, Lilian Wainwright suggested no monuments should be erected, funds for a public memorial were raised by a committee chaired by Viscount Burnham, owner of the *Daily Telegraph*, together with the Lord Mayor of London, the Bishop of London, and the chairman of London County Council. Sculptor Sir George Frampton accepted the commission in 1915, but declined any fee.

William IV Street is just beyond the Cavell memorial. The Trafalgar Square post of-







Goodwin's Court

fice further along William IV Street used to be famed as it was then open 24 hours per day, and was crowded on the nights of new stamp issues, when collectors wanted to be amongst the first to acquire them.

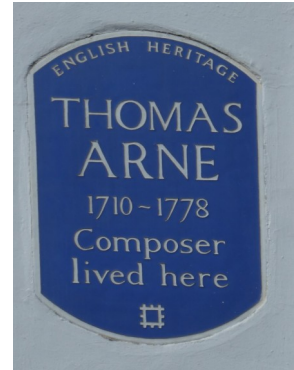
*Cross William IV Street, and walk along St Martin's Lane.*

*Keep a close look out for, and turn right into the very narrow alleyway Goodwin's Court. If you reach Mr Fogg's Tavern on the corner of New Row, you've gone a little too far.*

The attractive Goodwin's Court has gas lighting but is more famed as the inspiration for Diagon Alley in Harry Potter.

*Walk through Goodwin's Court and turn left at the end into Bedfordbury, then almost immediately right into New Row. Spot the gas light on right opposite "The Round House". At the junction with Garrick Street cross over into King*

*Street, this has modern gas lights.*



Above no 31, Sandro, on the left, by the gas light, there's a blue plaque for the composer Thomas Arne. Thomas Arne 1710 – 1778, wrote the patriotic song *Rule Britannia*, a version of *God Save the King*, which became the British national anthem, and the song *A-Hunting We Will Go*. Arne was a leading British theatre composer of the 18th century, working at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Arne is buried at St Pauls Church, Covent Garden, see below, where he has a memorial plaque.



*At the end of King Street you are at Covent Garden Piazza. Turn right to St Paul's Church, and right again into the garden.*



over the years. Samuel Pepys noted in his diary on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1662, the first "Italian puppet play" under the portico — the first recorded performance of "Punch and Judy", a fact commemorated by the annual MayFayre service in May, and a plaque outside the church. The artist J. M. W. Turner and dramatist Sir William S. Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) were both baptised at St Paul's.

*After you finish exploring the church and garden turn right in the Piazza and*







*right again into, the gas illuminated, Henrietta Street.*

There is a green City of Westminster plaque for the novelist, Jane Austen, who stayed in 1813- 1814, above no. 10 on the left. She was an English novelist known primarily for her six major novels which interpret and comment upon the British landed gentry at the end of the 18th century. Austen's plots often explore the dependence of women on marriage in the pursuit of favourable social standing and economic security. She was commemorated by a stamp issue in 1975, on the 200th anniversary of her birth.

On the right, a few paces on, another green plaque commemorates William Shipley, who held the foundation meeting of the (Royal) Society of Arts in Rawthmell's Coffee House on this site on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1754.

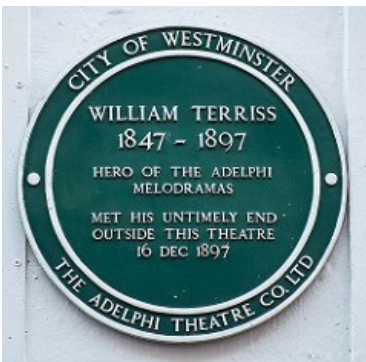


*At the end of the road turn left into Bedford Street. Stop when you reach the junction with Maiden Lane, and look right into Chandos Place.*

There is a blue plaque to Charles Dickens above TGI Friday's. He apparently worked there as a boy.

*Now turn into Maiden Lane, which also has gas lights.*

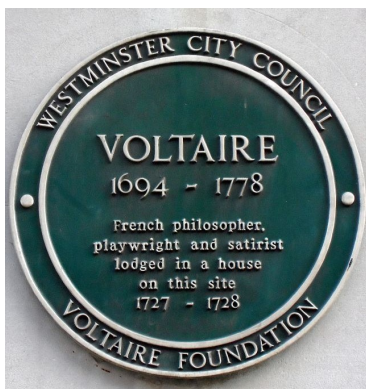
As the narrow road widens slightly, on the right, by the stage door of the Adelphi Theatre, a further green plaque commemorates William Terriss (1847 – 1897) "Hero of the Adelphi melodramas" who "met his untimely end outside this theatre 16 Dec 1897". Terriss, whose real name was William Charles James Lewin, became one of Britain's most popular actors. He was known for swashbuckling hero roles and was also a notable Shakespearian performer.



Terriss had Richard Prince dismissed from an acting role after a disagreement, but Terriss continued to pay him a little, via the Actors' Benevolent Fund, and tried to find him acting work. However, by the end of 1897 Prince was destitute but unemployable. When his request for money was refused by the Fund, he waited for Terriss at the entrance to the Adelphi. At his trial he was found guilty but insane, so was sent to Broadmoor Asylum, where he died in 1936.

Further details can be found here:

[http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMHQ5Z\\_William\\_Terriss\\_Maiden\\_Lane\\_London\\_UK](http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMHQ5Z_William_Terriss_Maiden_Lane_London_UK)

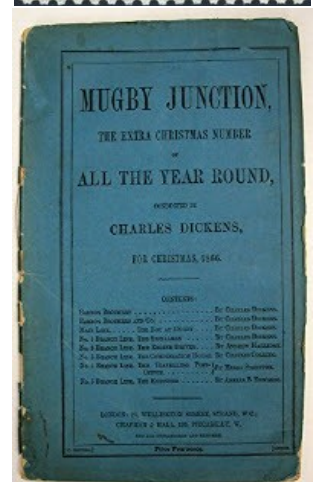


*Continue along Maiden Lane to No. 10. (Note that as you pass No. 15, the alley, Bull Inn Court, is the same as is mentioned further on, so a suitable short cut, should you wish)*

At No.10, a further green plaque confirms that the French philosopher, playwright and satirist, Vol-

taire (1694 – 1778) lodged here in 1727 – 1728. He had been exiled to England as an alternative to imprisonment in France, and lodged in Covent Garden for part of the time, to be close to his publisher. Voltaire circulated throughout English high society and published essays in English. He was permitted to return to France after two and a half years exile.

*At the end of Maiden Lane turn left into Southampton Street, and unless you wish to return to Covent Garden, almost immediately turn right into Tavistock Street, with its modern gas lights. Pass the London Transport Museum on the left and continue to the junction with Wellington Street.*

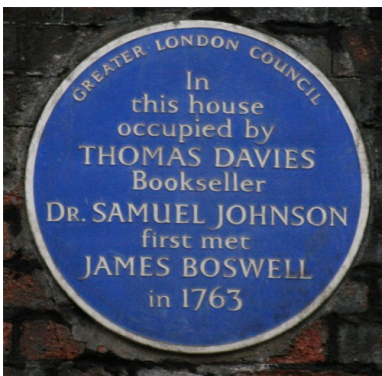






On the wall of the building on right, 26 Wellington Street, across the junction is a blue plaque to Charles Dickens. It says that the offices of Dickens' magazine "All the Year Round" were housed here together with his private apartments, from 1859 – 1870. All the Year Round was a successful weekly magazine launched by Dickens in 1859, which included a mixture of fiction and non-fiction. It included international affairs, new developments in science, tales of exploration and adventure in distant parts as well as instalments from Dickens' own works.

*Turn left into Wellington Street, and left into Russell Street.*



A few doors along on the left, at no. 8, above Balthazer Boulangerie is a GLC blue plaque to Dr Samuel Johnson (1709 – 1784) who first met James Boswell (1740 – 1795) there in 1763, the house being occupied by a bookseller, Thomas Davies (c. 1712 – 1785). Dr Johnson made lasting contributions to English literature as a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer and editor. His dictionary, published in 1755, was acclaimed as "one of the single greatest achievements of scholarship" and was pre-eminent until completion of the Oxford dictionary 150 years later. James Boswell, the 9<sup>th</sup> Laird of Auchinleck, was a Scottish biographer and diarist. He is best known for his biography of his friend, Dr Johnson. Their first conversation is quoted in Life of Samuel Johnson as follows:



[Boswell:] "Mr. Johnson, I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it."

[Johnson:] "That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help."



Samuel Johnson was commemorated on the 200th anniversary of his birth,

by a stamp in the Eminent Britons series, in 2009.

*Retrace your steps along Russell Street and turn left into Bow Street. On the left you soon reach the Royal Opera House.*

The building is often simply referred to as Covent Garden, after a previous use of the site of the opera house's original construction, in 1732. The current building is the third theatre on the site following disastrous fires in 1808 and 1856. The facade, foyer and auditorium date from 1858, but almost every other element of the present complex dates from an extensive reconstruction in the 1990's. You can see the view on the 1980 13½p stamp in the London Landmarks series, from Bow Street.



*Retrace your steps along Bow Street, but this time cross Russell Street and continue along Wellington Street, cross Tavistock Street, and turn right at the junction with Exeter Street.*





Walk along Exeter Street. There is gas lighting, including corner wall mounted gas lamps, at Burleigh Street and as Exeter Street itself, turns to the left. You arrive at Strand, opposite the Savoy Hotel.

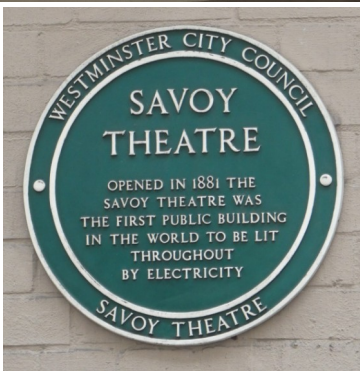
Cross Strand carefully, and turn to the right.

A few metres along you reach a freehouse, The Coal Hole, which has a gas lamp adjacent to one of its signs. Turn immediately left into the narrow Carting Lane. Go down the steps.



A few metres further on, on the left hand side, you will see three globes inscribed Savoy Theatre. The centre one, with an electric light above, has a Westminster green plaque below with the explanation. These globes commemorate that when it opened in 1881, the Savoy Theatre was the first public building in the world to be lit throughout by electricity.

Continue a little further down Carting Lane.



On the right is a gas light with a difference. This is the last remaining example in London of a sewage lamp. The Webb Patent Sewer Gas Lamp was invented in the late 19th century by the Birmingham inventor Joseph Webb. In London the lamps were used for two main reasons; firstly to burn off the smells and germs from London's sewer system, and secondly as a low cost, low maintenance way to keep London lit up at night.

Methane was collected by a small dome in the roof of the sewer, with the gas then being diverted into the lamp on the street above. The lamp remains lit 24/7, powered at least partly by an almost unlimited amount of waste from guests staying at the nearby Savoy Hotel.



Interestingly, the effluence from the sewers was not actually concentrated enough to fully power the lamps. Instead, the lamps were "dual powered" by ordinary town gas supplies which heated the filament up to around 700 degrees F. This heat then drew the methane and other gases from the sewer system, in turn ventilating up to three quarters of a mile of pipe!

A City of Westminster plaque confirms the nature of this gas light.

Retrace your steps to Strand and turn left. A few metres along on the left you'll find the Strand Stamp Centre, and across the road is Stanley Gibbons, the "home of stamp collecting since 1856". Assuming you are not drawn into







*these establishments, cross the road and turn into Lumley Court, just to the side of Stanley Gibbons. Check out the gas lamp and return to Strand, go along a few more metres and turn into another narrow alleyway, Bull Inn Court, next to 408 Strand. Bull Inn Court, which has gas lights, leads to Maiden Lane, where it comes out close to the Adelphi Theatre.*

On the left of Bull Inn Court you'll find the Nell Gwynne, a traditional pub of a type that is nowadays very rare in central London. The customers usually extend out into the Court, as space inside is limited.



Nell Gwynne Tavern was built on the site of the Old Bull Inn, and named after the infamous mistress of Charles II. Nell, born and raised in the locality at St Martin in the Fields, sold fruit in the nearby Covent Garden market before gaining fame as an actress on the Drury Lane stage. Samuel Pepys describes seeing "the mighty pretty Nell" on his way to the Strand in 1667. Barnabas Blessed, great-great-grandfather of the actor Brian, was a bookbinder and stationer in the court at the beginning of the 19th Century. And as already mentioned, in 1897, William Terriss, was murdered a few yards from the pub.

Today, 'the Nell' is one of London's most charming and historic hidden treasures, offering a selection of local beers, wines and spirits. It also claims one of London's best jukeboxes, packed with classic old 45 records. A limited menu is served here, and they specialise in toasties, sausage rolls and giant Scotch eggs. Opening times are Monday to Friday 11.30 – 23.00, Saturday 12.00 – 23.00 and Sunday 12.00 – 22.00.



Bull Inn Court

*Once you finish in Bull Inn Court, return to Strand, and turn to the right. Cross the road when convenient. You'll shortly reach Villiers Street alongside Charing Cross Station.*

There's a collectors market at the lower end of Villiers Street every Saturday from 07.00 – 15.00, in the covered car park opposite Embankment station. There are usually stands with coins, banknotes, post cards and militaria, as well as stamps.

*Continue along Strand to the roundabout at Trafalgar Square, where you take The Mall, which is the third exit. Here you will see Admiralty Arch, which you go through, close to the end of the road. Go along The Mall to the first main junction on the left, where you turn into*





### *Horse Guards Road.*

There are gas lights all along Horse Guards Road, on the park side all lights are gas, but on the other side some of the lights are electric. You will soon reach Horse Guards Parade, where the changing of the Life Guard takes place daily at 11.00, except on Sunday when it is at 10.00. The ceremony lasts about half an hour, and you can expect much smaller crowds than those at the Changing the Guard at Buckingham Palace. With no railings between you, and those taking part, it's ideal for photographs.



*Continue along Horse Guards Road to the end, where you turn left into Birdcage Walk and almost immediately right into Storey's Gate.*



Horse Guards Road

*For an early return to Victoria, turn right rather than left, along Birdcage Walk. This returns you to Buckingham Palace, to retrace your steps from earlier. You would then see that Birdcage Walk has gas lighting all along the park side of the road, and that the main paths across St James's Park are also gas illuminated.*

*But assuming that you are continuing the walk, continue along Storey's Gate.*

A little before the end you come to the Central Hall, where Stampex, the British National Stamp Exhibition was held from 1954 until 1969, when it moved to the Royal Horticultural Halls, Westminster. On 20th March 1966 the Jules Rimet Trophy, the solid gold prize for the winners of football's World Cup, was stolen here. It had been displayed at Stampex by Stanley Gibbons, being in the country prior to the World Cup finals taking place. It was fortunately recovered a week later, having been left under a hedge in south east London.



*Continue to the end of Storey's Gate and cross Broad Sanctuary to arrive in The Sanctuary.*

This is the open area where you see the tall memorial, shown at right, the Crimea and Indian Mutiny Memorial, which was erected in 1861.

*Cross the Sanctuary, and go through the archway into Dean's Yard.*

You can walk all round Dean's Yard, which comprises most of the remaining precincts of the former monastery of Westminster, not occupied by the Abbey buildings. It is a large gated quadrangle, closed to public traffic, surrounding a green upon which Westminster School pupils have legal rights to play football. The buildings of Westminster School, Westminster Abbey Choir School and Church House, the headquar-







ters of the Church of England, occupy the quadrangle. It is a surprisingly quiet and tranquil area in Westminster.

Historically, Westminster Abbey was one of the last ecclesiastical sanctuaries to surrender its ancient rights, which meant that the precincts were largely occupied by undesirable and dangerous inhabitants. This Sanctuary extended beyond Dean's Yard as far as the north side of Parliament Square, where Thieving Lane was named for the local profession. It is not often remarked that H M Treasury is built upon the site of that lane.

There are several types of gas lights in Dean's Yard, including old wall mounted lights, and some very delicate looking street lamps, and elaborate lamps at the Abbey entrance.



*Having looked around Dean's Yard, exit the way you came in, and look to the right, to the entrance to Westminster Abbey.*

Note here more very elaborate gas lamps at the Abbey entrance, to the left of the shop. Westminster Abbey was subject of a 1966 set of stamps commemorating the 900th Anniversary of its founding.



*Now, for the final stop, turn to the left, away from the Abbey. Take the first turning on the left, which is Great Smith Street. Walk about 300m to the junction with Great Peter Street, cross, and turn to the right along Great Peter Street to the end of the first building.*

On the end of the Seacole building, which is part of a government Department, the Home Office (almost opposite the end of St Ann's Street) is a green City of Westminster

plaque. This states that you are at the site of the Gas Light and Coke Company (GLCC) gasworks, which provided the first public supply of gas in the world, in September 1813. Pipes were to be laid to the Parliament buildings, but the first paying contract, in November 1813, was with the Church of St. John (now the concert venue St John's Smith Square) en-route to there. The use of gas rapidly expanded over the next few years so by September 1815 the mains had extended as far as the Covent Garden Theatre (now the Royal Opera House), where around 80 lamps were installed.





The gas works grew to occupy a large site here, through to Horseferry Road, where the GLCC had their offices for many years. The gas works was closed in 1875 as the company used larger and more efficient works, and the site is now mainly government offices.

This concludes the walk.

*For return travel, the closest underground station is St James's Park, which you can reach in about 650 metres by retracing your footsteps along Great Peter Street and Great Smith Street to Victoria Street, where you cross and turn immediately left into Tothill Street (across Victoria Street from The Sanctuary), and the station is about 250*

*metres along Tothill Street.*

*Alternatively, to return to the start point at Victoria is about 1,100 metres. To do this, continue walking along Great Peter Street in the direction you were going. Straight on at the first mini roundabout into Greycoat Place (The Grey Coat Hospital on left), then follow Greycoat Place to the right at the next mini roundabout and turn right (by "The Greencoat Boy") into Artillery Row to Victoria Street, where you turn left and continue, to reach Victoria station.*

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