



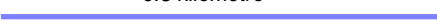


This walk starts and ends at Pimlico Station

# Westminster & Pimlico

 Full walk 9.9 km  
 options  
 connection with another walk



 0.5 kilometre



Pub: the Cask

## walk notes

*A circular pavement walk of 9 km taking in the stuccoed terraces of Pimlico and that part of Westminster behind the abbey originally known as Tothill.*

### **Pimlico**

The origin of the name Pimlico is not known but is believed to have been used in 1626 to refer to a small group of cottages which used to stand near present day Ranelagh Gardens.

At that time a mixture of swampy land with a scattering of cottages and a market garden originally known as the Neat House Gardens, famous for its wholesome produce of herbs and vegetables.

In the seventeenth century the Manor of Ebury was divided up and leased by the Crown to servants or favourites. In 1623, James I sold the freehold for £1,151. The land including modern Pimlico, Belgravia and most of Mayfair and Kensington was sold on several times, until it came into the hands of heiress Mary Davies in 1666.

At the age of 12 she was married to Sir Thomas Grosvenor, a member of an obscure Cheshire family. By 1820 the area had become urban fringe and in addition to the market gardening there were taverns, resorts and industry until increasing demand for property made the unfashionable West London start to look attractive. (As a result the Grosvenors became subsequently became the richest family in Britain, Dukes of Westminster and still own most of Mary Davies's inheritance, though not Pimlico, which they sold in 1953.)

In 1825 Grosvenor contracted Thomas Cubitt to develop Pimlico and the marshy ground was reclaimed using soil and hardcore excavated during the building of St Katherine Dock.

In 1843 Cubitt laid out the street and squares of today's Pimlico. His plan developed logically as a NW-SE extension from his layout of posher Belgravia, carried across the then canal by two new bridges, and continued as Belgrave Road and St George's Drive,

containing along with Lupus Street the grandest houses. The heart of Pimlico lay between these two new roads

### **Vincent Square**

Vincent Square was enclosed for Westminster School from part of Tothill Fields by Dr Vincent, former pupil and headmaster of the school and subsequently Dean of Westminster. He employed a man with a horse to plough a ditch around an area of some eleven acres; his receipt for the fee is in the Abbey archives.

### **Smith Square Conservation Area**

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, properties began to be developed on land belonging to Sir James Smyth, between the Abbey and Horseferry Road.

An Act of Parliament in 1711 levied a tax on coal imports into the Port of London to fund the building of 50 new churches and appointed a commission to oversee the project. Thomas Archer was appointed to this commission alongside Hawksmoor, Vanburgh, Wren and others. The site for St. John's was acquired from Henry Smith (who was also Treasurer to the Commissioners) in June 1713 and building commenced immediately, on a baroque design by architect Thomas Archer. Unforeseen difficulties with the foundations meant that the church took 15 years to complete, eventually consecrated in 1728. The four towers of Archer's original design were to have had pinnacles but the plans were altered and the towers given cupolas, possibly for economy or because of trouble with the foundations.

Around the same period, possibly encouraged by the building of the church, new residential development began to take place within the existing street layout and remains virtually intact today although Smith Square itself has contracted around the church as more houses were built. More land had been acquired by Barton Booth, a successful actor and former pupil of the school. In 1722 he built up Barton Street and

Cowley Street. The area as a whole retains a sense of unity and architectural coherence, more buildings than not are listed and the rest are of architectural merit, consisting mainly of three storey brown brick terraces with mansards and basements, dating from c.1722-26. Roofs are tiled, some with dormers, and windows are timber sash throughout the area, often under flat gauged brick arches. Most of the terraces have fine cast iron railings to the basement lightwell, many with flambé torch finials.

### **Dean's Yard**

Dean's Yard is built on the site of The Elms and the former monastery farmyard. The East side consists of buildings occupied by Westminster School; the South by Church House, the headquarters of the Church of England; the West by several School buildings and Westminster Abbey Choir School; and the North by the archway to the Great Sanctuary, Abbey offices and part of the Deanery.

### **South of St James' Park**

The construction of Victoria Street which opened for use in 1851, divided the community in two. Tothill Street, which extends to the Broadway from the Broad Sanctuary at the west front of the Abbey, is the most ancient street in Westminster. By the time of Elizabeth there were houses on both sides; those on the north side had large gardens reaching to St. James's Park, and those upon the south extended to Orchard Street.

### **55 Broadway**

Frank Pick, assistant MD of the Underground Group, commissioned the architect Charles Holden to design the building. On its completion in 1929, 55 Broadway was the tallest building in London. On each elevation is a pediment decorated with 8 reliefs, collectively known as 'the four winds'. Each relief was carved by an avant-garde sculptor of the day. Halfway along the north and east facades are a matched pair of sculptures, Day and Night by Jacob Epstein. The modernism and graphic nakedness

created public outrage on their unveiling. The building's modern and assertive design was considered an architectural masterpiece and was awarded the London Architectural Medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1929.

### **Westminster Cathedral**

In 1884 land was acquired on the site of the former Tothill Fields Bridewell prison. Construction began in 1895 and the cathedral opened its doors in 1903. John Francis Bentley's extraordinarily opulent interior decoration was still incomplete and he never saw his vision realised. What he created, however, lives on, as one of the most striking and impressive examples of neo-Byzantine architecture in Europe. The cathedral is striking for its use of bands of coloured brick and stone on the exterior, its tall and eye-catching bell tower, or campanile, and the richly decorated interior, following the Byzantine tradition of mosaic and marble. The dominant feature of the interior is a massive baldacchino, or sculpted canopy, above the high altar, made of white and coloured marble, pearl, lapis lazuli, and gold. Throughout the chapels are colourful mosaics in Arts and Crafts style, created after Bentley's death.

