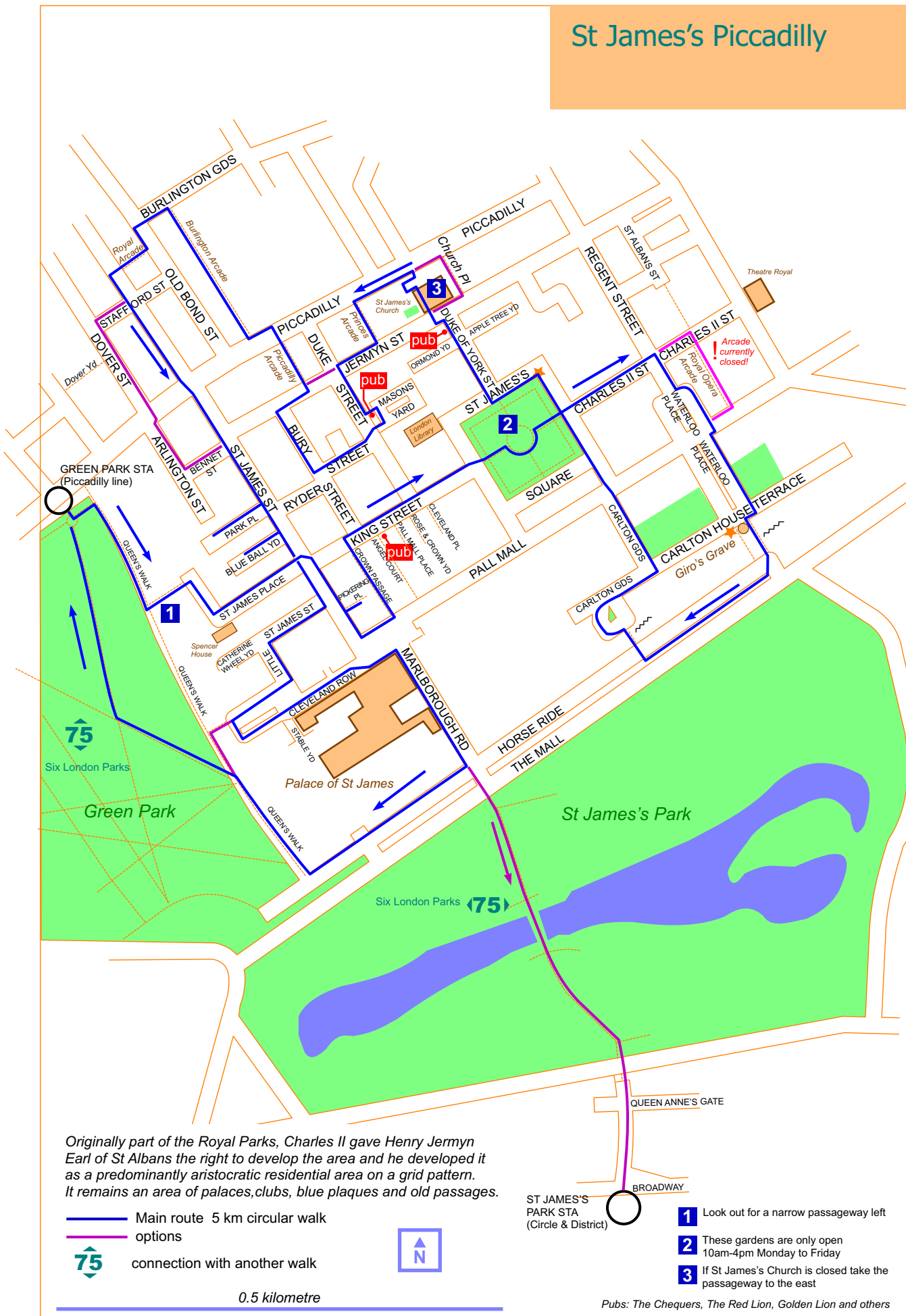


St James's Piccadilly



Originally part of the Royal Parks, Charles II gave Henry Jermyn Earl of St Albans the right to develop the area and he developed it as a predominantly aristocratic residential area on a grid pattern. It remains an area of palaces, clubs, blue plaques and old passages.

walk notes

Kings Cross Walkabout

This pavement walk takes in a compact area and five posh shopping arcades.

St James's Piccadilly

The area of St James is associated with Henry Jermyn, 1st Earl of St Albans, close friend of Henrietta Maria and rumoured to be the father of Charles II. After the restoration the land north of St James's Palace, St James's fields, belonging to Henrietta Maria was leased to Jermyn to pay off a debt he accrued while helping restore James to the throne. Jermyn wanted the land, part of the parish of St Martin's in the Fields, to become a parish in its own right but the church authorities didn't play ball. So Jermyn used his own funds to help create a new church of St James to a design by the young up-coming architect Christopher Wren. With his experience of Italian renaissance classical architecture in modern Paris, Jermyn was inspired to recreate something similar here in London. He laid out St James's Square, surrounded by tall, elegant buildings, and around it he planned a grid of broad, paved streets, including one that he named after himself, Jermyn Street. The first development of its kind in London, it took a long time to build, starting in 1661 and only just being finished in Jermyn's lifetime. The area became a parish in its own right shortly afterwards.

The street of Pall Mall in St James's was laid out on a former alley that ran between two rows of elms. It had been used to play a game similar to croquet by the name of 'palle-maille' (meaning ball and mallet). It was relocated to a new site to the south in 1661 and the old alley was upgraded into a street initially called Catherine Street after Catherine of Braganza; Pall Mall persisted and the street was renamed. The close proximity of Pall Mall to St James's Palace and the royal park made it a highly desirable location and properties built along it were much sought after. Shops for the wealthy and shopping arcades followed to the north off Piccadilly and the walk includes 5 smart arcades.

Being close to the seat of government

the area became known for its embassies and residences of politicians and clubs and the area is riddled with blue plaques. Sadly Jermyn's dream is gradually being compromised by stark modern developments.

Of the old alleys only a few remain and the walk traces these. It also passes the spot where PC Fletcher was killed, a yard famous for dueling and the grave of a German ambassador's dog and skirts the Palace of St James.

The Royal Opera Arcade was completed in 1818 and is the world's oldest existing shopping arcade. Designed by John Nash, the prolific Regency architect also responsible for buildings such as Buckingham Palace, Marble Arch and The Brighton Pavillion, The Royal Opera Arcade was built on the west side of The Royal Opera House, now the site of Her Majesty's Theatre.

Burlington Arcade opened a year later. Lord George Cavendish, who lived in Burlington House, commissioned Samuel Ware to design the Arcade, officially 'for the gratification of the public and to give employment of industrious females' but in fact to stop people throwing things onto his property.

The Royal Arcade was constructed in 1879. The Arcade replaced the Clarendon Hotel, With its saddled glass roof, richly decorated stucco arches, curved glass window bays and elegant Ionic columns, it was the epitome of Victorian design. The arcade has changed little and retains all its original features.

The Piccadilly Arcade was opened in 1909, having been designed by Thrale Jell of Waterloo Place

Princes Arcade forms part of Princes House which was originally built to house the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours and was opened by the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1883. The Arcade itself was opened in 1933.