

LONDON'S HIDDEN CORNERS, LANES & SQUARES



Graeme Chesters

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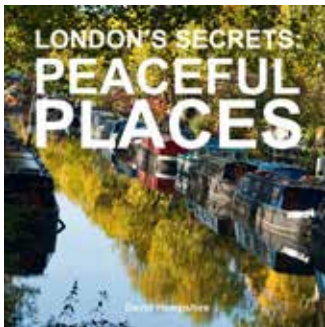
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London's Secrets: PEACEFUL PLACES



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David Hampshire

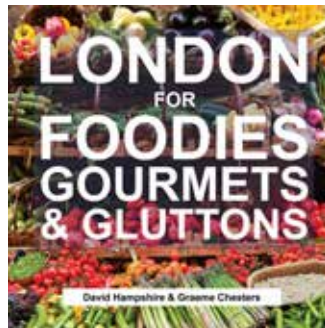
London is one of the world's most exciting cities, but it's also one of the noisiest; a bustling, chaotic, frenetic, over-crowded, manic metropolis of over 8 million people, where it can be difficult to find somewhere to grab a little peace and quiet. Nevertheless, if you know where to look London has a wealth of peaceful places: places to relax, chill out, contemplate, meditate, sit, reflect, browse, read, chat, nap, walk, think, study or even work (if you must) - where the city's volume is muted or even switched off completely.

LONDON FOR FOODIES, GOURMETS & GLUTTONS

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David Hampshire & Graeme Chesters

Much more than simply a directory of cafés, markets, restaurants and food shops, *London for Foodies, Gourmets & Gluttons* features many of the city's best artisan producers and purveyors, plus a wealth of classes where you can learn how to prepare and cook food like the experts, appreciate fine wines and brew coffee like a barista. And when you're too tired to cook or just want to treat yourself, we'll show you great places where you can enjoy everything from tea and cake to a tasty street snack; a pie and a pint to a glass of wine and tapas; and a quick working lunch to a full-blown gastronomic extravaganza.



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Introduction

The inspiration for this book was the advice of the great Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), something of an expert on London, to his friend and biographer James Boswell on the occasion of his trip to London in the 18th century, to 'survey its innumerable little lanes and courts'. In the 21st century these are less numerous than in Johnson's time, so we've extended his brief to include alleys, squares and yards, along with a number of mews, roads, streets and gardens.

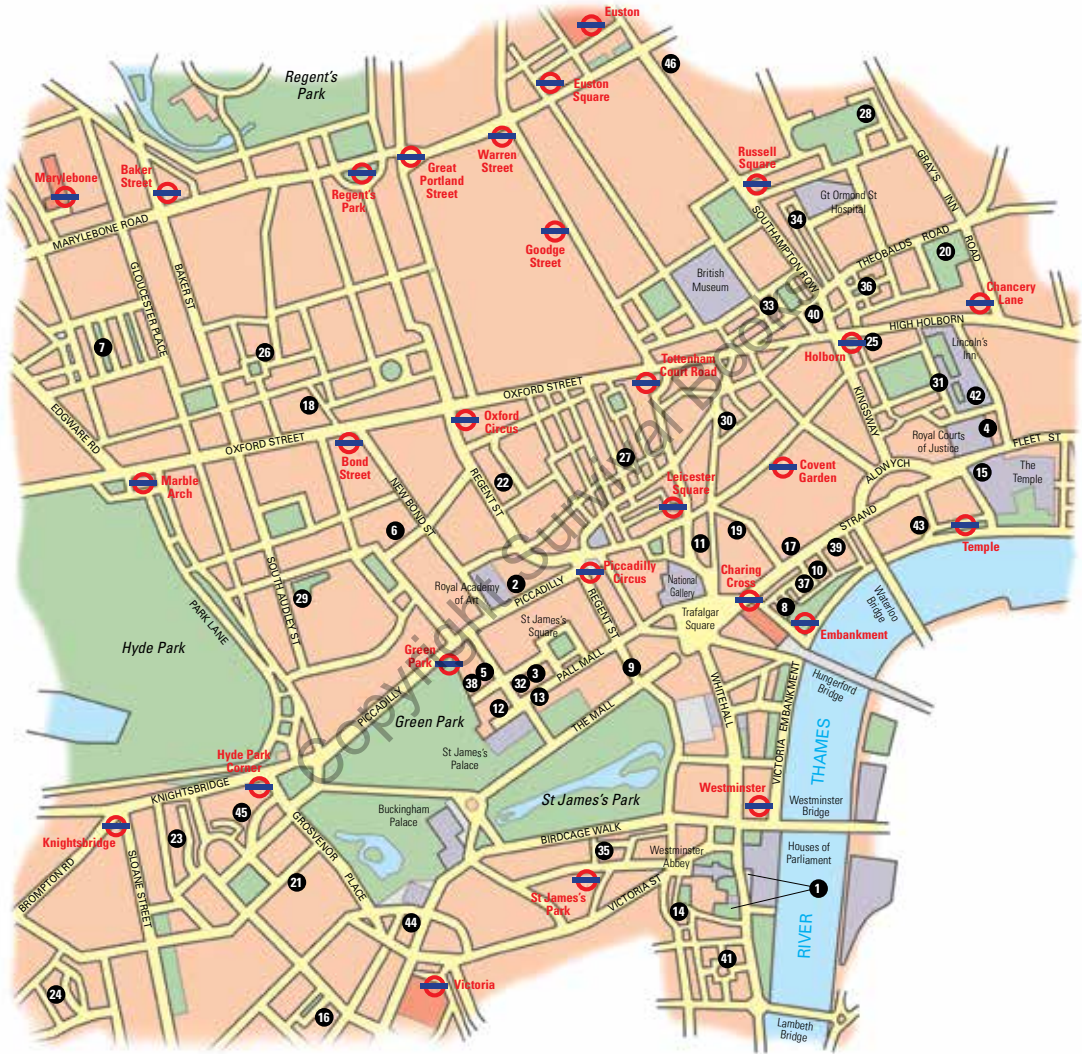
London's Hidden Corners, Lanes & Squares takes you off the beaten track to seek out places that often fail to register on the radar of visitors and also most residents. Entries range from ancient history-soaked alleys and lanes in the City – where you half expect to bump into one of Charles Dickens's characters or even the author himself – to smart, pastel-painted mews in Chelsea built to house horses and carriages (now home to multi-millionaires); and from unexpected oases of Georgian elegance in traffic-plagued central London to tranquil Kensington squares, where you can hear birdsong and almost smell the scent of money on the breeze.

Samuel Johnson also said, 'It is not in the showy evolutions of buildings, but in the multiplicity of human habitations which are crowded together, that the wonderful immensity of London consists.' Every corner featured in this book has a story to tell, from those who lived there (actresses, bishops, painters, politicians, philosophers, writers... even ghosts of former residents!), significant historical events (from duels and demonstrations to plots and executions) and bizarre surviving landmarks such as a brick kiln, a sewer gas lamp and a Parisian *pissoir*.

Although this book isn't intended as a walking guide, most of the places featured are close to one another in central London – notably in the hubs of Westminster and the City, where you can easily stroll between them – and all are near public transport links and easy to reach.

I hope you enjoy discovering *London's Hidden Corners, Lanes & Squares* as much as I did, and if you happen across more secret gems on your travels, I would love to hear about them.

Graeme Chesters
July 2015



CHAPTER 1

CENTRAL LONDON

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1. Abingdon Street Gardens & Old Palace Yard, SW1

Transport: Westminster tube

Also known as College Green, Abingdon Street Gardens sit opposite the Houses of Parliament, next to the elegant, understated Jewel Tower, with Old Palace Yard on the other side of the tower. This area is often ignored in favour of the obvious 'big-hitting' attractions nearby, but is well worth exploring.



Jewel Tower

Abingdon Street Gardens were laid out in the 1960s on land that once contained the medieval Palace of Westminster. The palace had two main courtyards, Old Palace Yard and New Palace Yard. Poet and 'father of English literature' Geoffrey Chaucer lived in the former when he was Clerk of the King's Works in the 14th

century, and dramatist Ben Jonson had a house here too. Sadly, the yard and houses were lost in the 1834 fire that destroyed much of the medieval palace, with the

Jewel Tower and Westminster Hall the only significant survivors.

The three-storey tower is surrounded by a moat and was built from Kentish ragstone in 1364-66 to house Edward III's royal treasure. From 1621-1864 it housed the House of Lords' records and from 1869-1938 was home to the Weights and Measures Office. It's now managed by English Heritage.

The Gunpowder Plot was partly hatched in Old Palace Yard in the house of Thomas Percy. Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators were executed here in 1606, as was Sir Walter Raleigh in 1618.

Gunpowder Plot conspirators



2. Albany Court Yard, W1

Transport: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus tube

Albany Court Yard is tucked away north of Piccadilly, near the Royal Academy and opposite Hatchards bookshop. It comprises a three-storey mansion and two service wings, with a courtyard in front. The buildings – known variously as Albany Court, The Albany or Albany – comprised a mansion, until being converted into exclusive bachelors' apartments.

Albany was designed by Sir William Chambers and constructed in 1770-4 for the 1st Viscount Melbourne. In 1802 it was sold and converted into around 70 chambers, sometimes called 'sets', for bachelors who weren't involved in 'trade' and who had good social connections; women weren't allowed here until later.

Albany Court gets its name from Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany, who lived here in the 1790s.

It became one of London's most fashionable addresses, with famous residents including Prime Ministers Lord Palmerston, William Gladstone and Edward Heath; poet Lord Byron; authors Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene and J. B. Priestley;

dramatist Terence Rattigan; photographer and royal consort Anthony Armstrong-Jones; broadcaster Malcolm Muggeridge; philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin; and actors Terence Stamp and Dame Edith Evans.

Albany Court was also the 'home' of A. J.

Raffles, the fictional gentleman thief created by E. W. Hornung in the 1890s. Today, you don't have to be a bachelor to live here, although you do need to be at least 14 years old (and wealthy!).



3. Angel Court, SW1

Transport: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus tube

Situated between King Street and Pall Mall, this is one of London's more atmospheric courts. It's narrow and paved, and takes its name from the 17th-century Angel Tavern which once stood here. Angel Court has covered entrances at both ends and on the corner with King Street sits the narrow Golden Lion pub, with attractive bow windows.



The pub dates from the earlier 19th century and attracts a mixed clientele, including tourists, office workers, and staff from the area's many gentlemen's clubs – plus the odd gentleman on the way to or from his club (open Mon-Fri, 11am-11pm, and Sat, noon-5pm).



A plaque in Angel Court, opposite the side of the pub, records this was the site of the St James's Theatre, built in 1835. It was demolished in 1957, despite an epic campaign of protest led by Vivien Leigh and Sir Laurence Olivier, whose heads appear on a panel relief above the plaque (below).

The Oscar Wilde plays *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* had their premieres at St James's Theatre in the 1890s.



4. Bell Yard, WC2

Transport: Temple tube

Bell Yard runs north from the Strand, just to the east of the monumental Royal Courts of Justice building, very much in the heart of legal London. A paved passageway opening into a cul-de-sac, it's a narrow, historic thoroughfare with fine views of the Court building. The east side of the yard is lined with barristers' chambers and solicitors' offices, while at number 19 is a Law Society office (in a striking white building).

Bell Yard dates from the early 1400s and was the site of a tavern called Le Belle. This was demolished towards the end of the 16th century and later replaced by another tavern, the Bell, also now gone. Nowadays it's eminently respectable and affluent, but Bell Yard was described as 'a filthy old place' in 1736.



Carey Street runs from west to east at the northern end of Bell Yard and is the site of the convivial Seven Stars, a tavern popular with those working in the adjacent Courts.



Royal Courts of Justice

The Royal Courts of Justice is a vast edifice with over 1,000 rooms and 3.5mi (5.6km) of corridors, while the structure contains 35 million bricks faced with Portland stone.

5. Blue Ball Yard, SW1

Transport: Green Park tube

An unassuming, covered entrance connects Blue Ball Yard with St James's Street. As a result, the yard is often overlooked, which is a pity as the narrow entrance conceals a lovely space, once a stable yard and now the site of the unusual, two-storey annexe of the adjacent Stafford Hotel. The name probably comes from the Blue Ball Tavern on St James's Street, which was demolished in the late 18th century.

The yard dates from around the late 17th century, when it was probably home to the servants of the aristocracy who lived in the environs of St James's Palace. Back then it was called Stable Yard, as this was also



where the carriage horses of the royal family were kept. The mews-like coach houses, which today form the hotel annexe, were built in 1741-2 and later used as garages until being developed by the Stafford in 1990.

Today this old block is a notable survivor and retains a slightly rustic air, despite being in the heart of London's gentlemen's club land.

Look out for the names of famous race horses displayed on the front doors of the hotel annexe's ground-floor rooms.



6. Bruton Place, W1

Transport: Bond Street or Green Park tube

Bruton Place runs from the northeast corner of Berkeley Square to Bruton Street. It's an attractive, L-shaped mews in a tranquil area of narrow streets and smart restaurants, built on land acquired by the 1st Lord Berkeley of Stratton in the later 17th century. It was originally the site of coach houses and stables for the grand houses on Berkeley Square and Bruton Street, while the name (also found in nearby Bruton Lane) comes from Lord Berkeley's country estate near Bruton in Somerset.

Bruton Place has a number of places to rest and refuel, including The Guinea Grill, established in 1635, although its location is believed to have housed a tavern since the 15th century; it's now an outlet of the Young's brewery. Next door is Greig's restaurant, an upmarket grill in an attractive building.



Bruton Place is narrow and quiet, with low-rise buildings on both sides and, although it now has various architectural styles, it retains a mews-like air. A couple of properties – numbers 36 and 38, dating from the 1890s – still have the hoists used to lift sacks of grain to the lofts.



7. Bryanston Mews West & Bryanston Square, W1

Transport: Edgware Road or Marble Arch tube

Bryanston Mews West links Bryanston Place with George Street, just off the southern end of the Edgware Road. It's a long, straight mews with a gentle slope, partly original along one side and with modern building along the other. Perhaps a little over-restored, it's still a quiet, civilised place to live in this hectic part of London.



The name Bryanston dominates in this locale, which is part of the Portman Estate and named after Bryanston, the Portman family seat in Dorset. The Estate originated with Sir William Portman, Lord Chief Justice of England, who purchased land hereabouts in 1553. Turn right from the north end of

There's a blue plaque on number 1 Bryanston Square commemorating the Turkish statesman Mustapha Reschid Pasha, while outside the garden railings nearby is a memorial to William Pitt Byrne, proprietor of *The Morning Post*.

the mews along Bryanston Place and you come to Bryanston Square, rectangular and elegant, overlooked by terraces mainly original and in a variety of styles.

The central garden is private and features an attractive range of planting, including some large plane trees. The square was built in 1812 by David Porter and has featured in a number of novels, including C. P. Snow's *The Conscience of the Rich* and Algernon Cecil's *A House in Bryanston Square*.



8. Buckingham Street, WC2

Transport: Embankment tube or Charing Cross tube/rail

Buckingham Street is a short, historic thoroughfare tucked away off John Adam Street. It manages to pack plenty of interest into its modest yardage and claims to have housed more famous folk than any other comparable street in London, as a sprinkling of plaques attests. Many of the properties had different builders and are therefore in a variety of styles, so no bland uniformity here. Most have long been used for commercial purposes and some are listed buildings



No. 14 Buckingham Street

The street was built around 1675 on the site of York House, one of the great medieval mansions that used to line the Strand. Indeed, the southern end overlooks the York

Watergate in Victoria Embankment Gardens, which can be accessed down a set of steps from the street and across Watergate Walk.

The Watergate (below) was the place where York House residents and visitors would alight from their river craft. It's now stranded well away from the river bank, showing how much wider the Thames was in the 17th century.



York Watergate today



The roll call of former residents reads like a who's who of historical celebrity. The plaque on number 14 states that 'in a house formerly standing on this site lived Samuel Pepys, diarist, Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford and politician, William Etty, painter, and Clarkson Stanfield, painter'. Number 14 was rebuilt in 1791.

Samuel Pepys also lived at number 12, from 1679-88 (moving to 14 afterwards). Philosophers David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau lived at number 10 in 1766, while poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge lived at number 21 in 1799. Russian leader Peter the Great stayed at number 15 in 1698; writer Henry Fielding lived here in 1735, while in 1833-4 Charles Dickens occupied the top floor. The original number 15 was destroyed in the Second World War and later replaced.

The upturned cones attached to the railings in Buckingham Street are link snuffers. These were used to snuff out the 'link', a bare-flame torch made of hemp dipped in pitch which was carried by travellers in the days before street lighting.



The quirkiest aspect of Buckingham Street can be seen above the door of the house opposite number 12: an original fanlight window, which dates back to a time before a modern postal system. Until the 1840 invention of the penny post, houses didn't have numbers. Properties were instead identified by the name of the street and a copy of the pattern on the fanlight window above the door.



9. Carlton House Terrace & Waterloo Place, SW1

Transport: Charing Cross tube/rail or Piccadilly Circus tube

Waterloo Place leads off the Mall and is crossed by Carlton House Terrace, which runs to the east and west. Built in 1816 soon after the famous battle, it features several important statues, including one of the victorious Duke of Wellington astride his horse and another of polar explorer Captain Scott. The most eye-catching is the Duke of York Column (below), installed at the southern end of Waterloo Place in 1833.



Prince Frederick is thought to be the subject of the nursery rhyme *The Grand Old Duke of York*.

There's something slightly odd about the Duke of York Column. It's curiously tall – 124ft – and perched on top is a 14ft bronze statue of Prince Frederick, Duke of York (1763-1827), the second son of King George III. Frederick (below) became commander of the British Army and developed a (somewhat unfair) reputation for military dithering. He was undoubtedly feckless with money: when he died, he was a (then) colossal £2m in debt.



Following Frederick's death, despite his royal status, nobody could be found to fund a monument. In fact, the only way to raise the money (around £25,000) was to dock the pay of the British army for a day, regardless of

the soldiers' wishes. The great height of the subsequent column caused wags to suggest that it was the duke trying to escape his creditors.

Beyond the column, on the west side of Waterloo Place is the impressive cream façade of the Athenaeum, with blue detailing and a gilded statue. Founded in 1824, it's the most intellectual of London's clubs, named after Rome's ancient Athenaeum University. Opposite it is the Institute of Directors, which has been here since 1978 in a building that once housed the United Services Club. Founded in 1903, the Institute is the world's largest body representing individual business leaders.

Athenaeum Club



Take a stroll along Carlton House Terrace, built by John Nash in 1827-32 on the site of Carlton House. It comprises two lovely terraces, which the prominent architectural

critic Nikolaus Pevsner said 'may rank as the greatest terrace of houses ever built in Britain'; praise indeed. Number 11 has a blue plaque to William Gladstone, while number 1 has one to George Curzon, Viceroy of India (there's a statue of him nearby). Number 5 has plaques to Lord Palmerston and Charles de Gaulle (the Free French Forces had their headquarters here in 1940), while number 2 has a blue plaque to Field Marshall Earl Kitchener.

Some noted institutions have their headquarters in Carlton House Terrace, including the Royal Society at number 7 and the British Academy at number 10.

Carlton House Terrace

