

# LONDON'S HIDDEN SECRETS

A Guide to the  
City's Quirky &  
Unusual Sights

UNDERGROUND

Graeme  
Chesters

Fully Revised & Updated

# LONDON'S HIDDEN SECRETS

A Guide to the City's Quirky & Unusual Sights

Graeme Chesters



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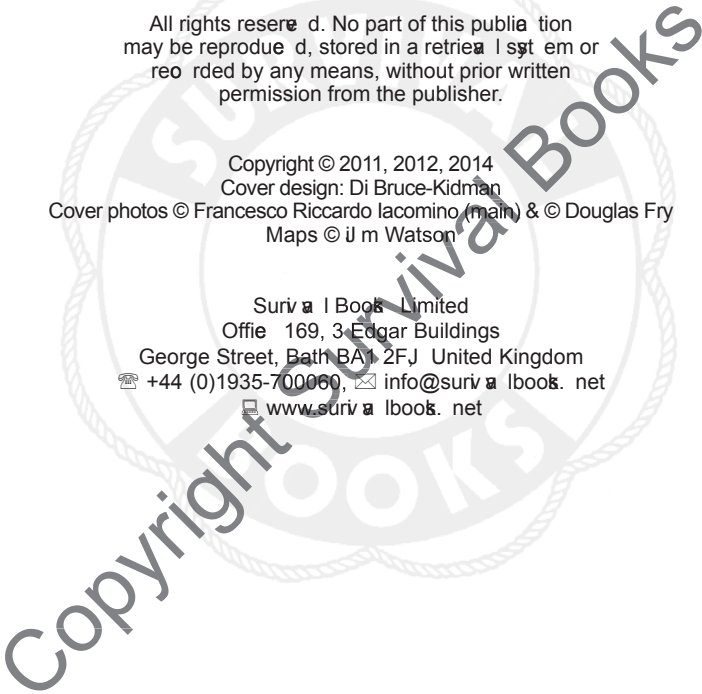


First published 2011  
 Reprinted (with changes) 2012  
 Reprinted (and updated) 2014

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 Cover design: Di Bruce-Kidman  
 Cover photos © Francesco Riccardo Iacomino (main) & © Douglas Fry  
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
 A CIP record for this book is available  
 from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-907339-40-0

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Printed in China by International Press Softform Limited





## Acknowledgements

I've been the fortunate recipient of much help, support and enthusiasm in researching and writing this book. In addition to the many photographers who provided images I would like to heartily thank the following (listed in no particular order): Lyne Milford (Goldsmiths, University of London), Martin Humphries (Cinema Museum), Ellie Manwell (Dulwich Picture Gallery), Catherine Starling (London Wetland Centre), Lindsay Friend (Dennis Severs' House), Nik Smith (Strawberry Hill House), Lucy Kaufman (The Dior Suite - for help and interest above and beyond the call of duty), Alison Parry (Garden Museum), Paul Hudson (RAF Museum), Gemma Colgan (Foundling Museum), Clare Lodge (Sue Bond Public Relations), Sarah Finbarr-Crisp (Chiswick House & Gardens Trust), Yogesh Patel (BAPS National Office), Nancy Loader (Geffrey Museum), Sarah Bellitt (Horniman Museum), Jennifer Humberstone (Open Space Department, City Gardens), Martin Gwilliams (Southwark Cathedral), Ashley Woodfield (Design Museum), Doris Csida (Rudolf Steiner House), John Sturrock (for The Goat at Spitalfields), Gemma Hopkins (Wellcome Trust), Anna Smith (Wellcome Images), Dune Brown (English Heritage), Mark Young (St Bartholomew the Great), Haley Kruger (Hunterian Museum), Joanna Bolitho (V&A Museum of Childhood), Claire Seaton (St Bride's Fleet Street), Sally James (Benjamin Franklin House), Angie Poppitt (All Hallows Church), Marc Obolis (Bank of England), Miranda Thomas (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance), John Aidiniantz (Sherlock Holmes Museum), Amy Randall (Wallace Collection), Alicia Anderson (Kensington Roof Gardens), Erica Davies (Ragged School Museum), Morwenna Rae (Dr Johnson's House), Catherine Charles (Canonbury Academy Limited), Angela West (St Ethelburga's Centre for Reflection and Peace), Valentina (Old Operating Theatre and Herb Garret), Francesca Strachan (Museum of Brands), Simon Quill (Nunhead Cemetery), Pia Ostlund (Chelsea Physic Garden), Sara O'Donnell (Fisher Museum), Oona Paterson (Wilton's Music Hall), Helen Elletson (7 Hammersmith Terrace), Natasha Merreroe (Grant Museum of Zoology), Terry Hunt (Chislehurst Caves), Alison Lowe (Felicities Limited), Kathryn Hughes (Whitechapel Bell Foundry), Danielle Payton (Petrie Museum), Holly Booth (Keats House), Nicola Kalimeris (Museum of London), Katty Pearce (Guildhall Art Gallery), Henry Vivian-Neal (Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery), Martin Wright (Handel House Museum), Elizabeth Flanagan (Whitechapel Gallery) and John and Hannah (Abney Park Cemetery).

Finally, special thanks are due to Peter Read, who commissioned and edited this book (and lent me a 'real' camera and provided his expertise), Lilac Johnson for proof-reading, Di Bruce-Kidman for doing creative things with the layout, Jim Watson for the superb maps and my wife, Louise, for continuing with the pretence that writing is a proper job. Last, but not least, thanks are due to the many photographers who provided images (listed on page 319) – the unsung heroes – whose beautiful images add colour and bring the city to life.



# London Sketchbook

ISBN: 978-1-907339-37-0

Jim Watson

*London Sketchbook* is a unique guide to the most celebrated landmarks of one of the world's major cities. In ten easy walks it takes you on a fascinating journey around the most famous of London's huge variety of vistas, with identification of the panoramic views and relevant historical background along the way.

Jim Watson's illustration technique is traditional line and wash, but his approach is that of a curious neighbour, seeking out the scenes which give each area its individual character – while keeping a keen eye open for the quirky and unusual.



**CHURCH**

Original by a famous English Church builder...



The church is a landmark of the area, and is one of the tallest in London. It was built in the 14th century and is a fine example of the Perpendicular style.



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# Contents

## **1. Westminster** **15**

---

1. Handel House Museum	17
2. Bond Street Sculptures & Statues	19
3. Goodwin's Court	21
4. Benjamin Franklin House	23
5. Shepherd Market	25
6. Apsley House	27
7. Wellington Arch	29
8. Spencer House	31
9. Berry Brothers & Rudd	33
10. Banqueting House	35
11. Churchill War Rooms	37
12. Queen Anne's Gate	39
13. Blewett School	41
14. Westminster Cathedral	43

## **2. Kensington & Chelsea** **45**

---

1. Kensal Green Cemetery	47
2. Museum of Brands	49
3. Holland Park & Kyoto Garden	51
4. Tower House	53
5. Leighton House Museum	55
6. 18 Stafford Terrace /Linley Sambourne House	57
7. Kensington Roof Gardens	59
8. Old Church Street	61
9. Thomas Carlyle's House	63
10. Chelsea Physic Garden	65
11. National Army Museum	67
12. Royal Hospital Chelsea	69
13. Japanese Peace Pagoda	71



### 3. City of London 73

---

1. Charterhouse Square & Florin Court	75
2. Bunhill Fields	77
3. Inns of Court	79
4. Staple Inn	81
5. Ye Olde Mitre Tavern	83
6. St Bartholomew the Great	85
7. Hogarth Murals at Barts	87
8. Postman's Park	89
9. Turkish Baths	91
10. Roman London's Amphitheatre & Guildhall Art Gallery	93
11. St Ethelburga the Virgin	95
12. Dr Johnson's House	97
13. Twinings Tea Shop & Museum	99
14. Ye Olde Cock Tavern	101
15. Whitefriars Crypt	103
16. St Bride's Church	105
17. Black Friar Pub	107
18. St Benet's Church	109
19. Bank of England Museum	111
20. Number 1 Poultry	113
21. Temple of Mithras	115
22. St Stephens Walbrook	117
23. St Mary Woolnoth	119
24. London Stone	121
25. Monument	123
26. All Hallows Church	125
27. London Wall	127

### 4. Central & North London 129

---

1. Little Venice	131
2. Rolling (Curling) Bridge	133
3. Rudolf Steiner House	135
4. Sherlock Holmes Museum	137
5. Jewish Museum London	139
6. Estorick Collection	141





7. Canonbury Tower	143
8. Wello me Collet ion	145
9. Auto-lo n of d remy Bentham	147
10. Grant Museum of Zoology	149
11. Petrie Museum of Egp tian Arb aeology	151
12. Foundling Museum	153
13. Charles Dile ns' Museum	155
14. Sir d hn Soane's Museum	157
15. Hunterian Museum	159
16. Rog l Institute of British Arb itet s' Building	161
17. Broada sting House	163
18. Wallae Collection	165
19. Tj urn Cone nt & Tj urn Tree	167

**5. South London** **169**

---

1. Thames Foreshore	171
2. Winb ester Palae & Clink Prison Museum	173
3. St Olaf House	175
4. Southwark Cathedral	177
5. Old Operating Theatre & Herb Garret	179
6. George Inn	181
7. Fashion & Tek ile Museum	183
8. Cinema Museum	185
9. Cuming Museum	187
10. Lambeth Palae	189
11. Garden Museum	191

**6. West London** **193**

---

1. 7 Hammersmith Terrae	195
2. Upper Mall, Doe Pub & Kelmsot t House	197
3. Chiswick House & Gardens	199
4. London Wetland Centre	201
5. Fulham Palae	203
6. Marble Hill House	205
7. Ham House	207

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8. Strawberry Hill	209
9. Hoover Building	211
10. Golden Mile, Brentford	213
11. Osterley Park & House	215

## 7. East London 217

---

1. Sutton House	219
2. Geoffrey Museum	221
3. Victoria & Albert Museum of Childhood	223
4. Ragged School Museum	225
5. Dennis Severs' House	227
6. Spitalfields Public Art Programme	229
7. Whitechapel Gallery	231
8. Whitechapel Bell Foundry	233
9. Wilton's Music Hall	235
10. Eastbury Manor House	237

## 8. East London - Thameside 239

---

1. Design Museum	241
2. Thames River Police Museum	243
3. Rotherhithe Street, Mayflower Pub & St Mary's Church	245
4. Museum of London Docklands	247
5. Mudgate Park & Farm	249
6. Greenwich Foot Tunnel	251
7. Thameside Sculptures: Quantum Cloud & Sliver of Reality	253
8. Royal Victoria Dock Footbridge	255
9. Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park	257
10. Thames Barrier Park	259
11. Woolwich Free Ferry	261
12. Diver Sculpture	263

## 9. Greater London – North 265

---

1. Art Deco Piccadilly Line Tube Stations	267
2. RAF Museum London	269
3. Neasden Temple	271



4. Fenton House	273
5. Burgh House & Hampstead Museum	275
6. Goldfinger's House	277
7. Keats House	279
8. Freud Museum	281
9. Holly Village	283
10. Abney Park Cemetery	285

### 10. Greater London – South 287

---

1. Gala Bingo Hall	289
2. Bellenden Renewal Area	291
3. Dulwich Picture Gallery	293
4. Horniman Museum	295
5. Nunhead Cemetery	297
6. Goldsmiths Sculpture	299
7. Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance	301
8. Ranger's House & Wernher Collection	303
9. Charlton House	305
10. Eltham Palace	307
11. Red House	309
12. Lesnes Abbey	311
13. Chislehurst Caves	313

### Index 315

---

### Photo Credits 319

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#### NOTE

Before visiting any here mentioned in this book it's advisable to check the opening times, which are liable to change without notice. Last entry to museums, galleries, etc is usually 30-60 minutes before closing time.



## Introduction

Writing this book has been a pleasure, an education and a labour of love. Despite having lived in northwest, central and southeast London at various times, and happily pottered around the city for many years, I now realise how much I had (and still have) to learn, and how many little-known delights London has to offer. Not only had I failed to visit many of the 140 'secret places' covered in this book I hadn't even heard of many of them!

London is a city with a omnipresence of secret places, being ancient, vast and in a constant state of flux. Newcomers have, of course, a wealth of world-renowned attractions to keep them occupied for a month of Sundays, which are more than adequately covered in a plethora of standard guide books. What *London's Hidden Secrets* does is take you off the beaten path to seek out the more unusual places that often fail to register on the radar of both visitors and residents alike. It aims to sidestep the buses and queues of London's tourist-bogged attractions and visit its quirkier, more mysterious side.

*London's Hidden Secrets* includes some of the city's loveliest buildings, secret gardens, bizarre museums, 'lost' graffiti, medieval pubs, cutting-edge art and design, and much more. The entries range from the entertaining antics of Little Venice to eccentric Thameside sculptures, from the stuffed remains of a philosopher to the poignant Foundling Museum, from the home of Sigmund Freud's famous sofa to where Handel and Hendrix meet, and from the spectacular treasures of Ham House to atmospheric Kensal Green cemetery.

Although this book isn't intended as a walking guide, many of the places covered are close to each other in central London – notably in the hubs of Westminster and the City – where you can easily stroll between them, while others are further out in the suburbs. However, all are close to public transport links and relatively easy to get to. And, conveniently for a city with a (largely unfounded) reputation for rain – London actually enjoys a lower annual rainfall than New York, Rome or Sydney – many of the attractions are indoors, meaning you can visit them whatever the weather.

So there's no excuse for not getting out there and exploring. I hope you enjoy discovering the hidden secrets of London as much as I did.

Graeme Chesters

June 2013

# London's Secrets



## LONDON'S HIDDEN SECRETS VOL 2

ISBN: 978-1-907339-79-0, £10.95

Graeme Chesters & David Hampshire

Hot on the heels of London's Hidden Secrets comes another volume of the city's largely undiscovered sights, many of which we were unable to include in the original book. In fact, the more research we did the more treasures we found, until eventually a second volume was inevitable.

Written by two experienced London writers, LHS 2 is for both those who already know the metropolis and newcomers wishing to learn more about its hidden and unusual charms.

## LONDON'S SECRET WALKS

ISBN: 978-1-907339-51-6, £11.95

Graeme Chesters

London is a great city for walking – whether for pleasure, exercise or simply to get from A to B. Despite the city's extensive public transport system, walking is also often the quickest and most enjoyable way to get around – at least in the centre – and it's also free and healthy!

Many attractions are off the beaten track, away from the major thoroughfares and public transport hubs. This favours walking as the best way to explore them, as does the fact that London is a visually interesting city with a wealth of stimulating sights in every 'nook and cranny'.

## LONDON'S SECRET PLACES

ISBN: 978-1-907339-92-9, £10.95

Graeme Chesters & David Hampshire

London is one of the world's leading tourist destinations with a wealth of world-class attractions: amazing museums and galleries, beautiful parks and gardens, stunning palaces and grand houses, and much, much more. These are covered in numerous excellent tourist guides and online, and need no introduction here. Not so well known are London's numerous smaller attractions, most of which are neglected by the throngs who descend upon the tourist-clogged major sights. What London's Secret Places does is seek out the city's lesser-known, but no less worthy, 'hidden' attractions.

**320 PAGES, PRINTED IN COLOUR**





**LONDON'S SECRETS:  
MUSEUMS & GALLERIES**

ISBN: 978-1-907339-96-7, £10.95

**Robbi Atilgan & David Hampshire**

London is a treasure trove for museum fans and art lovers and one of the world's great art and cultural centres, with more popular museums and galleries than any other world city. The art scene is a lot like the city itself – diverse, vast, vibrant and in a constant state of flux – a cornucopia of traditional and cutting-edge, majestic and mundane, world-class and run-of-the-mill, bizarre and brilliant.

So, whether you're an art lover, culture vulture, history buff or just looking for something to entertain the family during the school holidays, you're bound to find inspiration in London. All you need is a comfortable pair of shoes, an open mind – and this book!

**LONDON'S SECRETS:  
PUBS & BARS**

ISBN: 978-1-907339-93-6, £10.95

**Graeme Chesters**

British pubs and bars are world famous for their bonhomie, great atmosphere, good food and fine ales. Nowhere is this more so than in London, which has a plethora of watering holes of all shapes and sizes: classic historic boozers and trendy style bars; traditional riverside inns and luxurious cocktail bars; enticing wine bars and brew pubs; mouth-watering gastro pubs and brasseries; welcoming gay bars and raucous music venues. This book highlights over 250 of the best.

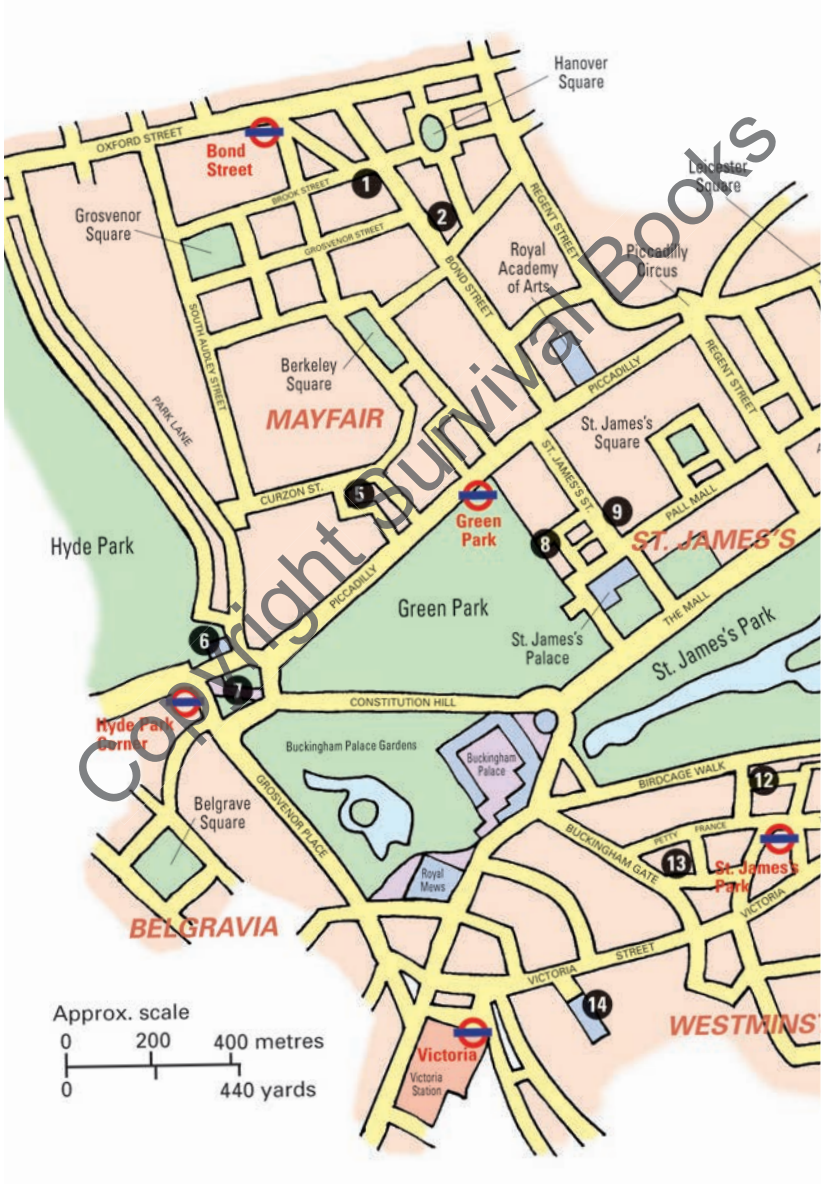
**LONDON'S SECRETS:  
PARKS & GARDENS**

ISBN: 978-1-907339-95-0, £10.95

**Robbi Atilgan & David Hampshire**

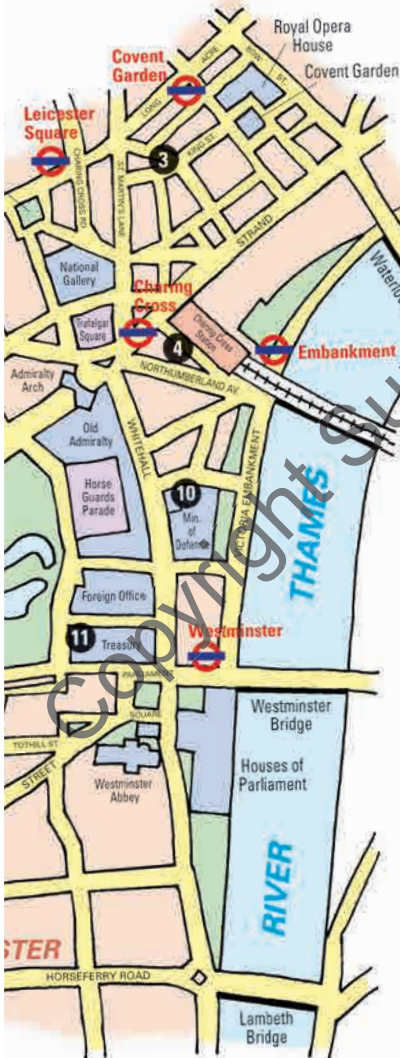
London is one of the world's greenest capital cities, with a wealth of places where you can relax and recharge your batteries. Britain is renowned for its parks and gardens, and nowhere has such beautiful and varied green spaces as London: magnificent royal parks, historic garden cemeteries, majestic ancient forests and woodlands, breathtaking formal country parks, expansive commons, charming small gardens, beautiful garden squares and enchanting 'secret' gardens. Not all are secrets, of course, but many of London's most beguiling green spaces are known only to insiders and locals.

**320 PAGES, PRINTED IN COLOUR**



# CHAPTER 1

## WESTMINSTER



1. Handel House Museum 17
2. Bond Street Sculptures & Statues 19
3. Goodwin's Court 21
4. Benjamin Franklin House 23
5. Shepherd Market 25
6. Apsley House 27
7. Wellington Arch 29
8. Spencer House 31
9. Berry Brothers & Rudd 33
10. Banqueting House 35
11. Churchill War Rooms 37
12. Queen Anne's Gate 39
13. Blewett School 41
14. Westminster Cathedral 43



## AT A GLANCE

**Address:** 25 Brook Street, Mayfair, London W1K 4HB (☎ 020-7495 1685, [www.handelhouse.org](http://www.handelhouse.org)).

**Opening hours:** Tue-Sat, 10am to 6pm (8pm Thu); Sun, noon to 6pm.  
Closed Mondays, including Bank Holidays.

**Cost:** £6 adults, £5 concessions, £2 children aged 5-16, under-5s free.  
Half price for National Trust members.

**Transport:** Bond Street underground station.



George Frideric Handel

## HANDEL HOUSE MUSEUM

This Grade I listed building was home to the noted baroque composer George Frederic Handel (1685-1759) from 1723 until his death. Handel was the first occupant of what was then a new house, and this is London's only museum to a composer. It's also where Handel composed some of his greatest music including the Messiah, Zadok the Priest and Music for the Royal Fireworks.

The house has finely-restored Georgian interiors, and is dedicated to celebrating Handel and his work. Frequent music rehearsals, weekly concerts and special music events in addition to regular displays and exhibitions bring Handel's world to life. There's also an impressive permanent display of Handel-related items. In 1998, the Handel House Collections acquired the Byrnie Collection, a major Handel collection of several hundred objects, including books, letters, early editions of operas and oratorios, portraits, prints and sculpture. As can be seen from some of Handel's portraits, he was obviously a man with a healthy appetite. One of his early biographers, William Cox put it succinctly, saying that he had "a capable indulgence in the sensual gratifications of the table".

Handel was born in Halle, Germany, but became a British citizen in 1727. His Brook Street home was away from the artistic centres of Soho and Covent Garden but within easy walking distance of St James's Palace, where he conducted his official duties, and the King's Theatre, Hammar Street, the focus of his Italian opera career at the time.

There must be something musical in the air in this expansive part of London, as the ground-breaking American rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix lived for a while with his English girlfriend next door in the top floor flat of 23 Brook Street, which is now the Handel House Museum's administrative office. In 2010 there was an exhibition at the museum, Hendrix in Britain. It's said that Hendrix was delighted to find himself living next door to Handel's old home and he bought a lot of the composer's music. Some people even claim to hear Handel's influence in some of Hendrix's later compositions!

Concerts are staged at the museum on Thursdays at 6.30pm, with most tickets £9 (£5 students). The booking line is ☎ 020-7399 1953 – full programme details and information about temporary exhibitions are on the website.

“ *Handel meets Hendrix* ”

## AT A GLANCE

**Address:** Old Bond Street and New Bond Street, London SW1.

**Opening hours:** Unrestricted access, but best during daylight hours.

**Cost:** Free.

**Transport:** Bond Street tube.



Roosevelt and Churchill

## BOND STREET SCULPTURES & STATUES

**B**ond Street doesn't actually technically exist. The only road from Piccadilly to Oxford Street is, in fact, two streets, Old Bond Street – built in the 1680s by Sir Thomas Bond – and New Bond Street, the stretch further north, which was created around 40 years later. It has recently become the most expensive retail location in Europe. However, as well as the glitz and glamour of the area's designer shopping outlets, it offers a series of works of art – sculptures and statues – that aren't always obvious unless you know where to look. The three described below are the most notable of a number on display. Keep your eyes peeled and keep looking up as you walk along the two Bond Streets.

At 34-35 New Bond Street, embedded above the entrance of the famous auction house Sotheby's, is London's oldest outdoor statue. It's an ancient Egyptian black basalt effigy of Sekhmet, the warrior goddess of Upper Egypt. Depicted as a lioness (the fiercest hunter known to the Egyptians), she was also a solar deity, bearing the solar disk and the uraeus (an upright form of spitting cobra). The statue dates from between 1600BC and 1320BC, and has been Sotheby's mascot since the 1880s when it was sold at auction for £40 but never collected by the buyer.

At 153 New Bond Street, look up to see four abstract pieces by Henry Moore which form a screen that adorns the Time and Life Building (the address is actually 1 Bruton Street). There's also a bronze by Moore inside, Draped Reclining Figure. The four external pieces are in a cubist style. Like Picasso (who Moore had met), Henry Moore was fascinated by African and Oceanic art, and that can be seen in the angular, bulky figures depicted in this work. Moore carved them out of Portland stone in 1952 in his back garden and they were installed in 1953. He subsequently tried to buy them back, as he thought their position on the third floor was too high for them to be seen properly.

Where Old Bond Street becomes New Bond Street – near Asprey's, the jewellers – there's a high quality modern bronze (1995) called Allies, by the American sculptor Lawrence Holofcener. It shows Roosevelt and Churchill, sitting on a bench and chatting amiably, and was financed by the Bond Street Association to mark 50 years of peace. Churchill's mother was American and he and Roosevelt were actually distant cousins. After the war, the two helped to found the United Nations.

“ Look up in the Bond Streets ”



## AT A GLANCE

**Address:** WC2N 4LL.

**Opening hours:** Free access.

**Cost:** Free.

**Transport:** Leicester Square or Covent Garden tube.



## GOODWIN'S COURT

This is another of London's time capsules. Walking along it is like stepping back into the 17th and 18th centuries (but thankfully without the filth, pestilence and religious persecution). It's a short, lovely alley, adjacent to 55-56 St Martin's Lane, and built into the front of the Theatre Goers' Club of Great Britain. Goodwin Court is easy to miss when travelling between Leicester Square and Covent Garden, and it's highly unlikely you will stumble across it unless you're deliberately looking. The entrance from St Martin's Lane is simply a doorway off the street, with a couple of steps down, so keep a lookout for it.

On its south side is a row of narrow, attractive late 18th-century houses with bowed Georgian windows, which hint at the buildings' previous incarnation as a row of shops. There are polished black doors with shining knobs and door knobs, with brass plates that announce the names of the businesses behind the doors.

It's more of an alley than a court – it isn't spacious enough to be the latter – and is an unusual survivor in an area that's seen a lot of remodelling and redevelopment. Much of this was by Inigo Jones on behalf of the Earl of Bedford. Among other things, they were responsible for the piazza in nearby Covent Garden.

Goodwin's Court is lit by three large, functioning gas lamps and at night the alley is atmospheric, magical even, in their flickering glow. It was previously known by the less attractive name of Fishers Alley, and although some people describe its atmosphere as Dickensian, it's much older than that. The current buildings first appear in local rate books in 1690, as a row of tailors. Although they don't have great architectural significance, they have an intimate charm and atmosphere. Not surprisingly, Goodwin's Court is popular as a film and television location.

It's just the type of place that comes to mind when thinking of Samuel Johnson's advice to his friend Boswell in the 18th century, on the occasion of the latter's arrival in London: "surely its innumerable little lanes and courts". Visitors today should keep an eye out for Goodwin Court's fire marks, an interesting throwback to the time before a centralised fire brigade. In those days, individual businesses had to insure against fire and an appropriate fire mark was displayed outside the building so that if a fire broke out, the fire fighting teams would know whether to take it or leave the building to burn. Goodwin's Court is lucky to still have them, as they're apparently very collectable.

“ A warren of narrow lanes and courtyards ”

## AT A GLANCE

**Address:** 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NF (☎ 020-7839 2006, [benjaminfranklinhouse.org](http://benjaminfranklinhouse.org)).

**Opening hours:** The 'Historical Experience' show can be seen Wed-Sun at noon, 1pm, 2pm, 3.15pm and 4.15pm. Guided tours on Mondays at the same times as shows.

**Cost:** Historical Experience show, £7 adults, £5 seniors and students, under 16s free. Guided tours £3.50 (under 16s free).

**Transport:** Charing Cross tube/rail or Embankment tube.



## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOUSE

While sympathetic to the view that visiting a museum dedicated to a man known for discoveries about electricity and for being a politician might be less than thrilling, we urge you to try this intriguing, well-organized exhibit. It's in a Grade I listed, architecturally important house built around 1730, which retains many original features, including the central staircase, lathing, panelling, stone, windows, beams and more.

It's the world's only remaining home of Benjamin Franklin, which opened on 17th January 2006 on the anniversary of his 300th birthday. Franklin (1706-1790) was born in Boston, Massachusetts to an American mother and British father. He lived and worked in this house for 16 years, on the eve of the American Revolution, and it has a special place in Anglo-American history, being the first de facto US embassy.

Benjamin Franklin's work as a philosopher, printer and more helped the progress of the Age of Enlightenment, and his scientific work meant that he's often to be regarded as the father of electricity. As if this wasn't enough for one person, he was also a key founder of the United States, the only statesman to have signed all four documents that created the new nation.

This is an inventive museum, which gives a good flavour of Franklin's many achievements and of the times in which he lived. The 'Student Science Centre' allows the recreation of experiments from his time in London, while the 'Scholarship Centre' on the top floor is a centre for the study of the many subjects that Franklin was involved with.

The Historical Experience takes a 'museum as theatre' approach, an innovative, entertaining way of presenting history. You're 'accompanied' by an actress who plays Polly Hewson, Franklin's landlady's daughter, who became like a daughter to him. This live performance, along with lighting, sound and visual projections, brings the whole 18th-century experience to life.

To end on a grisly note, the remains of four adults and six children were found at the property when it was being restored. Franklin's landlady's daughter Polly married a surgeon, who ran an anatomy school here. There's a small exhibit in the basement about medical history, which displays some of the 'Crown Street bones'.

“ *An American genius in London* ”



## AT A GLANCE

**Address:** Shepherd Market, Mayfair, W1 7PH (📍 [shepherdmarket.co.uk](http://shepherdmarket.co.uk)).

**Opening hours:** Unrestricted access.

**Cost:** Free.

**Transport:** Green Park tube.



## SHEPHERD MARKET

This hidden entrance, only a stone's throw from Green Park and elegant St James's, is described by the website as 'London's best kept secret'. It's a tiny series of closely packed streets tucked away between Piccadilly and Curzon Street in the exclusive district of Mayfair. The term Mayfair comes from the fair that used to take place on the site where Shepherd Market now sits. It was banned in 1708 because it had become boisterous and attracted troublemakers, and it was decided that building on the site was the best way to prevent their return.

Shepherd Market was developed in the period 1735-1746 by Edward Shepherd, a local architect and developer, who was active in many parts of Mayfair. It was built to house shopkeepers and other traders to serve the large houses of Piccadilly, and the Market would have thronged with their servants buying goods and services. Part of its attraction is that it has managed to retain its modest 18th-century feel, and is a reminder of the Georgians' facility with attractive, useful town planning.

During the '20s, Shepherd Market was a highly fashionable address. Next to it is Half Moon Street, where the fictional upper class wit Bertie Wooster and his wise aunt Cecily lived (characters created by the English comic writer P. G. Wodehouse). Nowadays, Shepherd Market is known for intimate restaurants, boutiques and good Victorian pubs – a pedestrianised escape from central London's hustle and bustle, but only a five-minute stroll from Green Park tube.

Many of the old market shops are now outdoor cafés and restaurants, but there's also a range of interesting specialist shops, many selling artwork, jewellery and antiques. The crowds in the Market's Victorian pubs often spill onto the streets, weather permitting, which adds to the atmosphere. Shepherd Market is best approached from Curzon Street via a covered passageway at number 47, which leads into the Market's network of alleys and streets.

The area used to be regarded as Mayfair's red light district, but although subculture has now largely moved elsewhere, the old reputation for vice was rekindled in the '80s when Shepherd Market was the venue for a trial between the highly successful novelist and Conservative party deputy chairman Jeffrey Archer and prostitute Monica Coghlan. Reports about this appeared in the *Daily Star*, but Archer denied it and won damages from the paper. Later, he was judged to have lied in court about the matter, was jailed and had to repay the damages he'd been awarded against the *Star*.

“ Lord Archer was here ”