

London Literary-Historical Ramble (Thursday, 22 June 2017)

We are staying in the City of Westminster, home to many of the most important and popular tourist sites in London. The City is really more of a large neighborhood/area, though it holds city status. It dates back to the eleventh century, when the Anglo-Saxon king Edward the Confessor built an abbey and a palace to establish Westminster as the seat of England's government. For centuries, then, there were two major cities in what we now call the Greater London Area: Westminster and London. During the Renaissance the two were linked through housing and new buildings, and the boundaries were continually meshed through the build-up of London as the world's capital in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today, Westminster is the center of London.

Our Thursday literary-historical ramble will take us to many important sites in Westminster. We can add or skip stops depending on how much time we spend at each stop. If we do the entire ramble below (which I hope we do), we'll walk about six miles over the course of seven hours or so (that's giving us time to explore, observe, take pictures, shop, eat, drink, etc.).

Stop #1: Picadilly Circus: A major road junction, or "circus" (round space), that was built in 1819 to connect Regent Street with Piccadilly, two major roads through London since at least the fourteenth century. Regent Street was named after the Prince Regent (later George IV)—thus the Regency Era (1811-20). The Circus is a heavily trafficked and travelled area at the intersections of major shopping areas and the theatre district, and it's also known for a bunch of neon signs and video boards on the buildings. The Circus pops up in many famous novels (make a list!).

Stop #2: Trafalgar Square: A public square in the Charing Cross neighborhood, this site commemorates the Battle of Trafalgar during the Napoleonic Wars, when Britain defeated the French and Spanish Navies (a decisive battle in 1805). Prior to the nineteenth century, this had been the site of the King's stables and carriages for over 600 years. The Square contains many monuments, sculptures, and statues dedicated to famous English persons, and it has been the center of many important political rallies and protests.

Stop #3: The Mall: The mall is a road that connects Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Palace that goes along St. James's Park. This entire road/area encompasses many important governmental sites and buildings, including the Victoria Memorial, Buckingham Palace, and 10 Downing Street. In the eighteenth century, the Mall was a fashionable promenade, where fancy, important people would take a walk to see and be seen by other fancy, important people.

Stop #4: Big Ben / Palace of Westminster / Westminster Abbey: An iconic London site, Big Ben is a giant bell/clock tower on the Palace of Westminster, home to the Houses of Parliament. Big Ben was built in 1859. The easily-identified bell chimes throughout Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, appears in a number of novels, and can pretty much be seen in any film or TV show set in London. Westminster Abbey is an iconic Gothic abbey right beside the Palace of Westminster. It has been the site for coronations, royal burials, and royal weddings since 1066. The current abbey was built in the thirteenth century, though there had been a church here since at least the seventh century. The south end of Westminster Abbey is home to Poets' Corner, where many of the most famous English poets are buried/memorialized, including Geoffrey Chaucer, Charles Dickens, William Blake, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and T.S. Eliot (among *many* others). We won't have time to go inside during our ramble, but you could come back on your free day.

Stop #5: Westminster Bridge / Scenic Spot: Famous bridge over the River Thames linking Westminster and Lambeth (another important city/area of London). The bridge was built in 1750 to accommodate the increasing population of London during the eighteenth century. It was solidified in literary history with Wordsworth's 1802 sonnet. We'll take a stroll across the bridge while I recite Wordsworth's famous poem to wondering passers-by. At the other side of the bridge is a "scenic spot" where we can view Big Ben/Westminster Palace/Westminster Abbey across the Thames (this is the shot you see most often in pictures of the palace).

Stop #6: Covent Garden: We will walk along the Thames to this popular neighborhood. Historically, Covent Garden was an important fruit-and-vegetable market and trading center (c. 700-1950), and it's now at the center of London's theatre district and major shopping areas. Again, this area is referenced in many novels and films. Some important sites in Covent Garden include St. Paul's Church and Drury Lane (home of the Muffin Man).

Stop #7: The Lamb and Flag: We'll be parched by this time, so we'll stop in for a pint at this historic eighteenth-century pub (first round on me). They also serve food if anyone wants a bite (I sure will).

Stop #8: Fleet Street / Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese: Fleet Street is an important road dating back to Roman times. During the Renaissance, it became the center of printing and publishing in London, and this is especially true during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most major publishers and newspapers were housed on Fleet Street from the sixteenth century until the 1980s. Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese is a seventeenth-century pub frequented by authors such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Alfred Tennyson, and Samuel Johnson (whose house is right down the road). The pub's cellars date back to a thirteenth-century monastery, and much of the interior is original nineteenth-century wood paneling. The pub is located on Fleet Street, where there are a number of other pubs and restaurants we can visit.

Stop #9: The Dog & Duck: We're just a few blocks from our hostel at this point. The Dog & Duck is an historic Victorian pub frequented by the likes of John Constable, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and George Orwell. This pub also serves food if anyone wants a proper dinner. And if anyone is tuckered out by this point, you could easily walk back to the hostel.