Fancy Free Walks *point your feet on a new path*

Westminster: all the Sights and a Shopping Round

Distance: 5½ km=3½ miles up to 9¼ km=5¾ miles very easy walking

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Refreshments: everywhere

Map: London A-Z

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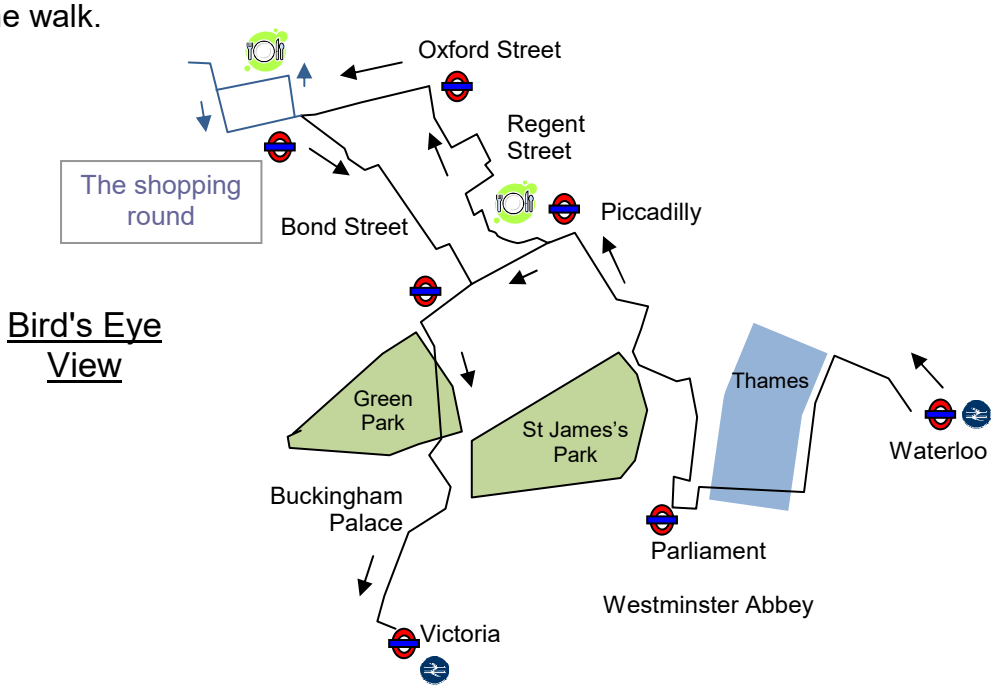
London Eye, Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, 10 Downing Street, Horse Guards, Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Regent Street, Carnaby Street, Oxford Street, Wallace Collection, Selfridges, Bond Street, Green Park, Buckingham Palace

In Brief

This is a pleasant stroll to see **all the main sights** of Westminster (5½ km=3½ miles), plus an extra loop called the **Shopping Round** (3 km=2 miles) that visits the main shopping areas. There is an extra little loop to visit the *Wallace Collection* and *Selfridges*. You can do **just shopping** or **just sights** of course.

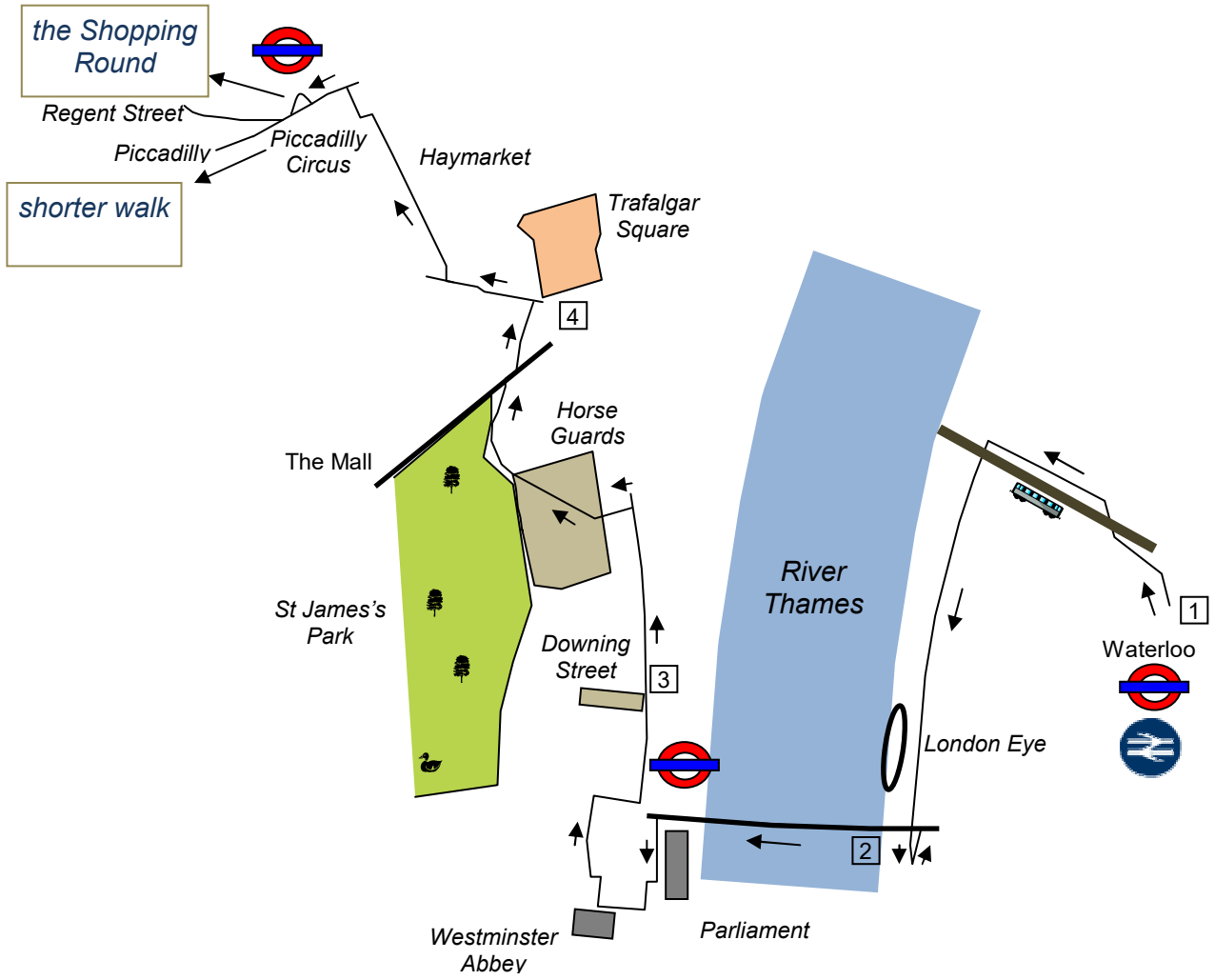
The walk begins at **Waterloo Station** (mainline or Underground) and ends at **Victoria Station** (mainline or Underground) with many other places to leave or join the walk.

Bird's Eye View



The Walk

Waterloo to Piccadilly Circus 3½ km=2 miles



1 Come out of the Waterloo Station by the main exit (that's on the far **left** if you have your back to the platforms), down the steps. Once outside, turn **left** and cross York Road. Take the pedestrian path ahead (Sutton Walk) that goes under a blue-painted railway bridge. Continue ahead past the **Topolski Century** (a gallery of artworks by the artist) and go up some steps beside the **Royal Festival Hall** on your right.

The Festival Hall is the only substantial remaining structure from the Festival of Britain of 1951 which was devised as a "tonic for the nation" after the austere war years. At the time it was supposedly an architectural and acoustical wonder and its reputation has endured following a renovation in 2007. It is the home of the London Philharmonic but also presents heavy metal and world music. The large foyer, situated underneath the "acoustic box", was designated a kind of "people's space". Free events are held there and it is always a lively open area. The champagne bar was closed long ago for being too elitist but the privately-run Skylon restaurant on the next level is definitely superior and has a fine cocktail bar.

At the end of the path, do *not* go up steps ahead over Hungerford Bridge but turn **left** under the bridge, down a slope onto the riverside walk, heading for the giant wheel. The South Bank is usually full of people, some watching the "living statues". Continue past the **London Eye**.

The London Eye is a cultural icon as well as a national landmark and nearly 40 million people has ridden in one of its big capsules. Other cities have built or designed larger wheels but the London Eye came first by many years. It is also unique in being cantilevered, that is, held up from one side only. It was run by British Airways and is now run by Merlin (who own Tussauds) emphasising its entertainment purpose. There are 33 pods each of which can hold 24 people, but pod 13 is always kept empty. (Why did they number them?, you may ask.)

Continue past the old County Hall which houses an aquarium and numerous attractions and eateries. Shortly you reach steps up to Westminster Bridge. Important! do *not* go up the steps to the bridge but go through the underpass first, then turn **left** up the steps and **left** again so that you are on the *opposite* side of **Westminster Bridge Road**.

2 Cross the bridge with great views to your left of the **Palace of Westminster**, heading for the Clock Tower ("Big Ben").

The Palace of Westminster is usually known as the Houses of Parliament but, strictly speaking, that applies to the people of the Commons and Lords who meet there. The building is in Perpendicular Gothic style. The architect who won the project was Charles Barry, assisted by expert in Gothic revival Augustus Pugin. Construction began in 1840 and lasted 30 years. The Elizabeth (Clock) Tower is usually known as "Big Ben" but that strictly applies to the 16-ton bell that chimes the hours.

Pass Big Ben and turn **left** round the corner of the Parliament buildings. Cross the road (St Margaret Street) using the second set of pedestrian lights, turn **left** for 20m and then **right** through a gate in the fence, between two churches. On your right is St Margaret's Westminster and on your left **Westminster Abbey**.

Westminster Abbey is the shrine of Edward the Confessor, dating from before 1066. The building you see now dates from the 1200s up to the 1500s. It has been the setting for every Coronation since 1066 and for sixteen royal weddings. The Abbey is a also monument to famous people: writers like Chaucer, Browning, Dickens, Wilde and the Brontes, scientists like Newton and Darwin, engineers like Brunel, heroes like Nelson and actors like Laurence Olivier. The Abbey is open from 9.30 am except Sundays.

From here you can explore the Abbey forecourt , going round to the cloisters, the bookshop and perhaps paying a visit to this fascinating building. But the route continues by turning **right** in front of the side entrance, back to Parliament Square. Turn **left** on the road for a few metres and cross it at the crossing lights. Go round two more sides of Parliament Square, passing a statue to Abraham Lincoln, heading back in the direction of Big Ben. Soon you reach a busy junction with **Parliament Street**. Turn **left** on this wide road, passing an entrance to Westminster tube station.

3 On your right in the centre of the road shortly is the *Cenotaph*, the focus for remembrance of war dead, and here the road becomes **Whitehall**. On your left soon is the entrance to **10 Downing Street**, home of the Prime Minister.

Downing Street is an early Georgian terrace built in the 1680s by the spy, traitor and get-rich-quick property developer Sir George Downing. The first Prime Minister to live there was

Sir Robert Walpole in 1735. He joined the future "No. 10" in the terrace to the bigger house on the other side, overlooking the Horse Guards. It now incorporates the PM's office, the Cabinet Room and is the PM's family home. Other houses in Downing Street are the home of ministers such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer (No. 11). Until 1973 it was possible to walk into Downing Street but in that year the steel gates were built.

As you continue along Whitehall, the **Banqueting House** is on the right near the statue of Earl Haig and, on your left, the entrance to the **Horse Guards**, always with two mounted guards from the Household Cavalry. Turn **left** here through the gates and the archway into **Horse Guards Parade**. *This open space is where the Trooping of the Colour ceremony takes place on the King's official birthday in June. It is also the site of the 2012 Olympics beach volleyball, much to the delight of the cavalry officers.* Cross the parade ground diagonally **right** towards a strange brown building. *On the other side of the road is St James's Park, the oldest of the Royal Parks.* Turn **right** on the wide boulevard known as the Mall and cross over to the other side. Just before you reach the triple archway *Admiralty Arch*, go diagonally **left** on a wide passageway and quiet street leading to **Trafalgar Square**, with **Nelson's Column** in the centre.

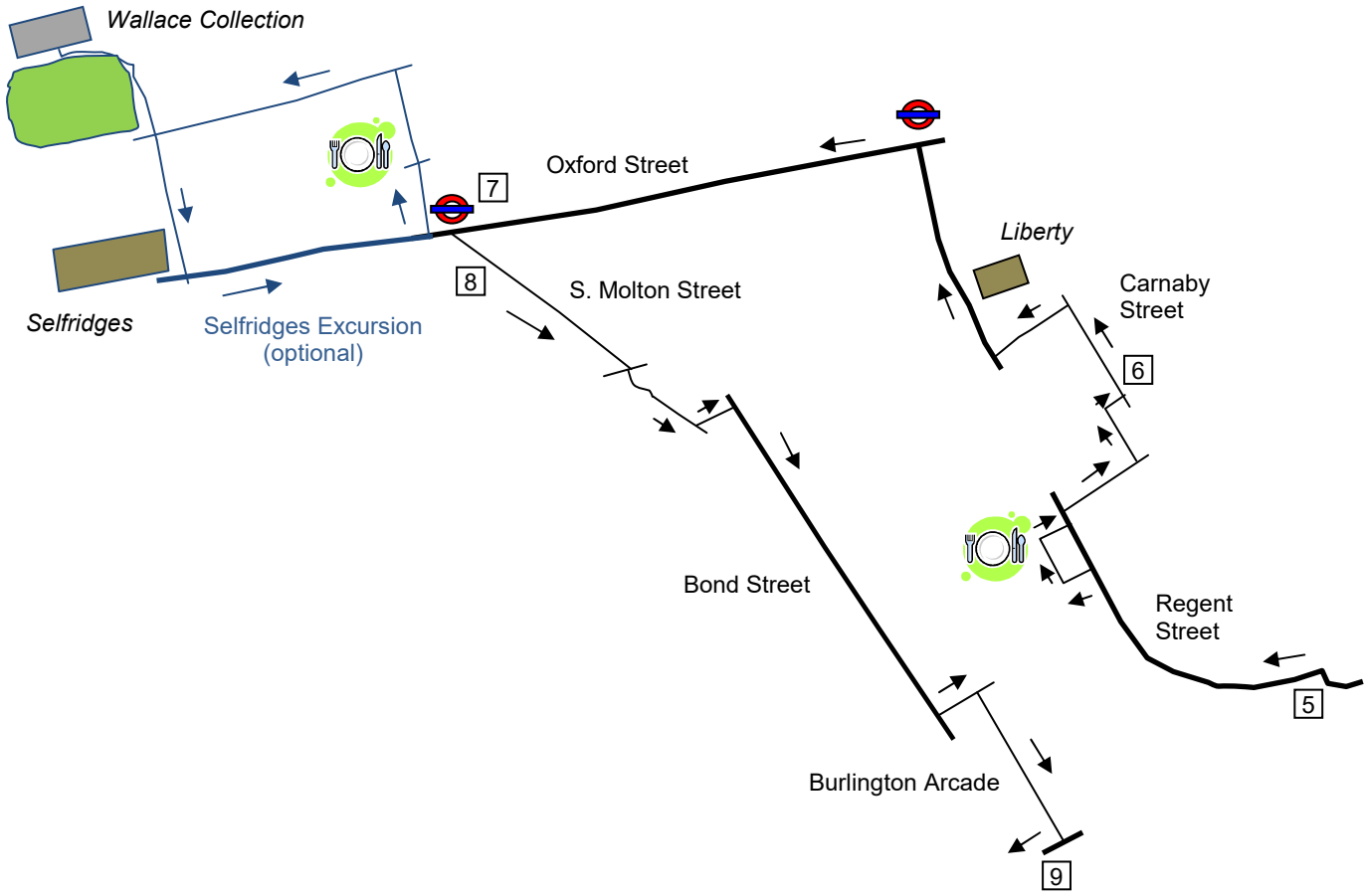
Nelson's Column was built in 1840 to commemorate Horatio Nelson's death at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The four lions at the base were designed by the painter Sir Edwin Landseer. The 5½ meter statue by E.H. Baily stands on top of a 46m Dartmoor granite column. The column has been climbed several times in a TV show or as a publicity stunt. It was also "sold" in 1923 to a visiting American by the notorious con-artist Arthur Furguson who also once "sold" the Eiffel Tower.

4 Staying on this side of the square, turn **left** along Cockspur Street and, in 100m, turn **right** onto the **Haymarket**, passing two theatres. At the end, you reach Coventry Street. On your right, not part of this walk, is Leicester Square. Turn left to **Piccadilly Circus**.

It is always said that the world revolves around Piccadilly Circus and that if you stayed there long enough you would be sure to bump into everyone you knew. The name comes from the street running west from here which in turn was named after the "piccadills" or lace collars that use to be sold there. Originally the winged statue of Anteros by Sir Alfred Gilbert (wrongly called "Eros") stood in the centre but a few years ago it was moved to improve the flow of traffic. Piccadilly Circus is famous as the central point for theatres and restaurants, with Mayfair to the west and Chinatown and Soho to the East.

Decision point. An exciting loop known as the **Shopping Round** starts from here. If you do **not** want to do the Shopping Round but you just want to see the remaining sights of Westminster, keep straight on across Piccadilly Circus, past Eros to the long straight street ahead. This is **Piccadilly**. Continue along Piccadilly, passing the royal grocer *Fortnum and Mason*, and the Royal Academy on the right after which you pass the entrance to the **Burlington Arcade**. The walk continues along Piccadilly from here. Now **skip** over the next part, the *Shopping Round*, and resume at the part called *Burlington Arcade to Victoria*.

The Shopping Round 3 km=2 miles



5 Take the wide curving street ahead and a little to the right, running between buildings with rounded arches. This is **Regent Street**, famous for its fine shops and seasonal Christmas illuminations. *Regent Street was one of the first streets in London to be planned as part of a grand architectural scheme along similar lines to Paris. The architect was John Nash and the work was finished in 1825.* The street runs parallel to Piccadilly and curves right. As it curves you will glimpse through an arch on your left Swallow Street which is known for excellent restaurants. After the road becomes straight, the second road on your left is narrow **Heddon Street**, now pedestrianised. Turn **left** on Heddon Street and turn **right** with the street passing several medium-priced restaurants. Turn **right** again at the end, under an arch, and turn **left** again back into Regent Street. Cross Regent Street here at the traffic lights and immediately turn **right** on Beak Street. Go past Kingly Street and, just after it, turn **left** into **Kingly Court**, a pleasant enclosed plaza of boutiques with walkway terraces on the upper floors. Turn **right** at the centre of Kingly Court and **left** at the next pedestrianised street. This is **Carnaby Street**.

Carnaby Street was the coolest destination for "swinging London" and is still well-known for its independent boutiques. In its heyday in the 1960s it was full of small "mod" and "hippy" shops and underground music bars. The "Rolling Stones" and the "Small Faces" were seen here and every designer sought an outlet here or in the neighbourhood to sell their gear.

6 This locale is worth exploring. Running parallel on the right is Newburgh Street, also crammed full of interesting boutiques. Continue up Carnaby Street and, just before a pub called the *Shakespeare's Head*, turn **left** on Fouberts Place, taking you back to Regent Street. Turn **right** on Regent Street, soon passing close to **Liberty**, the most charming and distinctive department store in London, built in Tudor style and especially known for its fabrics and high-class gifts, always worth visiting. Continue to the junction with **Oxford Street**. Turn **left** on Oxford Street, preferably using the "long diagonal" crossing so that you are on the far side of the street.

Oxford Street is Europe's busiest shopping street, well-known for its cheaper shops and its big department stores, including Marks and Spencer, John Lewis and Selfridges. It is 1½ miles (nearly 2½ km) long. The shops are a little posher as you near Marble Arch at the western end.

Continue along Oxford Street until on your left is the Bond Street Underground station. Your route from here is sharp **left**, just before the station, on South Molton Street. However, it is very highly recommended that you continue a little further to do the **Selfridges Excursion** in the next section which includes an exquisite free treasure house and a good possibility for *al fresco* dining.

If you want to return more quickly to Piccadilly without doing the Selfridges Excursion, simply skip the next numbered section and instead go **sharp left**, as indicated, on pedestrianised South Molton Street.

7 **The Selfridges Excursion** (extra 1½ km=1 mile). Cross Oxford Street and turn **left** for just a few metres, where you will find a sign pointing to **St Christopher's Place**. *(This turning is vital ! - it is **extremely** easy to miss.)* This is a narrow passage, hardly more than one person's width. Turn **right** here, passing several restaurants and boutiques and reaching a small plaza. *This area has many places to eat, most of them allowing al fresco dining.* Continue onwards along the alley to **Wigmore Street** and turn **left**. Proceed along Wigmore Street for 100m and turn **right** on **Duke Street**. In less than 100m is the little garden square, **Manchester Square** and, on the other side, the **Wallace Collection**.

The Wallace Collection is an exquisite free museum, containing many famous pictures such as Frans Hals "Laughing Cavalier", Fragonard's "The Swing" and pictures by Gainsborough, Reynolds, Velazquez, Murillo and Boucher. It also has beautiful rooms of French furniture as well as porcelain and armour.

After possibly visiting the Wallace Collection, return across Manchester Square back to the junction with Wigmore Street and continue straight over, still on Duke Street. (If you did not visit the Wallace Collection, this is a left turn.) Soon, on your right, you pass the side entrance to Selfridges department store, whose main entrance is round the corner in Oxford Street.

Selfridges is London's second great department store after Harrods. Its long front and its great solid square building are an icon of London. The founder Harry Gordon Selfridge had made a fortune from retail in his native America and he founded the new store along revolutionary modern lines, sparing no expense, both for the store and for his own lifestyle. His fortunes came to an end in the Great Depression and he left Selfridges, travelled around London by bus and died in a modest house in Putney. The Selfridges store rivals Harrods in its vast floors of designer clothes and its fabulous food store which is on the western side.

Turn **left** on Oxford Street, returning to the start of this little excursion, and go past Bond Street Underground station. Turn diagonally **right** on the pedestrianised South Molton Street, avoiding Davies Street which lies at a right angle.

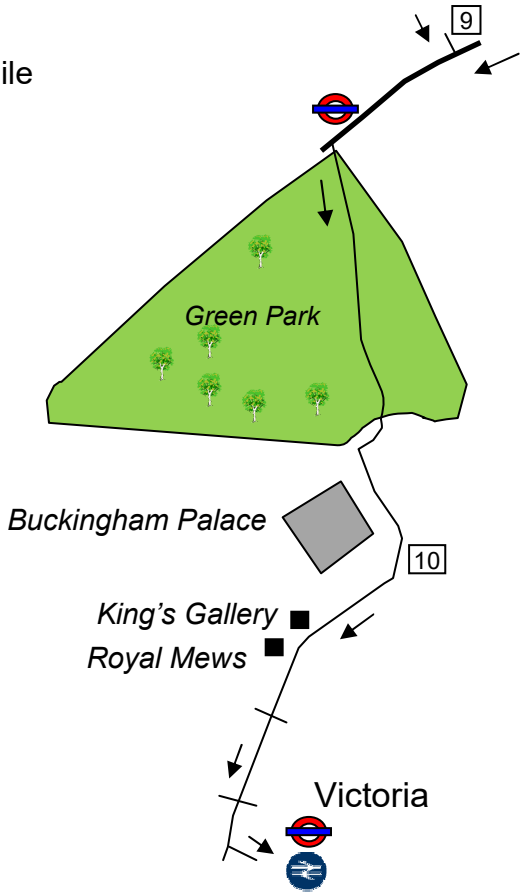
8 Follow **South Molton Street** with its shops and little eateries to its end at Brook Street. Cross straight over Brook Street, a fraction right, into **Avery Row**, another narrow passage with a junk shop and fascinating courtyards leading off. Just before Avery Row ends at a T-junction, turn **left** into Lancashire Court, with more boutiques and restaurants and quickly turn **right** on New **Bond Street**. *Bond Street is London's expensive upmarket shopping street, with numerous art dealers and jewellers including Tiffany, Sotheby's auctioneers and expensive clothing retailers.* Continue down Bond Street, at one time going through a short pedestrianised section where you can sit between statues of Roosevelt and Churchill. Continue until you have Tiffany jewellers on your right. Turn **left** here into Burlington Gardens, going past the premises of Salvatore Ferragamo. *On the roof of this decorative building is the Atkinson's Carillon containing 23 bells. It gives recitals at 17:00 on Friday and at 15:00 on Saturday during the summer months.* In just 30m, turn **right** into **Burlington Arcade**.

The Burlington Arcade was built in 1819 alongside Burlington House (the large building in Piccadilly that houses the Royal Academy). It contains two lines of small upmarket shops selling jewellery, silverware and antiques. The beadles in top-hats and uniform are all ex-soldiers. There are two other arcades on the other side of Piccadilly.

Go through the Arcade and turn **right** on **Piccadilly**.

You have reached the end of the **Shopping Round**. The **Westminster** tour, including Buckingham Palace, resumes here. If you want to end the walk here, you have Green Park Underground on the right and Piccadilly Circus on the left. The shorter walk re-joins the route here.

Burlington Arcade to Victoria 1½ km=1 mile



9 Turn **right** and continue along Piccadilly, passing The *Ritz Hotel* with its colonnade on your left. Just after the *Ritz*, go **left** into **Green Park**. *At the time of writing, the entrance is undergoing reconstruction.* Do not take the tarmac path along the edge nearest the houses, but the one just to its right, heading for Buckingham Palace. *Green Park is another of the eight Royal Parks, so named because it has no flower beds – only beautiful grass. But every spring it throws off its green mantle with a wondrous display of golden daffodils.* As you reach the other side, go through a line of trees and over the road to **Buckingham Palace**. If you see the gold-red-blue royal standard flying on the roof, then the King is in residence.

Buckingham Palace was once much more modest and was known as Buckingham House. King George III bought it in 1761 for his wife Queen Charlotte as a family home close to St James's Palace and it became known as the Queen's House. It was not until 1826 that it was enlarged with the assistance of architect John Nash at huge cost. He designed the current state rooms and semi-state rooms, which remain virtually unchanged since Nash's time. It is now the principal residence of the monarch and the centre of administration of the monarchy. The state rooms can be seen at the start of July and during August and September when the Queen is in Balmoral. Garden parties are held in the summer, attended by people from all walks of life.

10 Walk past the Palace on your right and keep **right** round the wall of the Palace, along **Buckingham Gate**. As you go, you pass first the **King's Gallery**, a precious public picture gallery housing a permanent collection and always a special exhibition, and then the **Royal Mews** where you may see, for a modest entrance fee, the golden State Coach and other coaches used for coronations and weddings. Continue over a junction at traffic lights. Soon, on your right you will see Victoria Square, a charming little garden square with a statue of the young Queen Victoria in its centre. Continue over the next big junction with Victoria Street and take the next road on the left. This takes you immediately to Victoria Station to end your walk by mainline or Underground.

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