



MarkHitsTheRoad

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Europe Trip, Visiting the Balkans... And Beyond (E19A-5)

United Kingdom – General London and Day Trips

In 2019, I took a trip to Europe. My focus was on some of the countries in the Balkans, but I book-ended the trip with stays in London. Highlights of my London stays included four day trips, four shows in West End theatres, an exploration of sites related to London's Roman history and some museums. It turned out that London's 2019 Pride parade took place while I was in town, too.

I have written up and posted separate summaries of my Roman Britain sightseeing and my visits to four Balkan countries.

This summary focuses on my general London sightseeing, including two of my day trips to regional destinations.

As this was my 7th visit to London, I didn't spend much time focused on the more traditional tourist sites. Buckingham Palace et al just haven't changed all that much since my first trip to London sixteen years ago.

But for those who might be disappointed at their exclusion, I'll give you a quick summary of those sites.

I took this picture of London's major highlights as I flew into Heathrow Airport from Bulgaria.

Sherlock Holmes' office

on Baker Street

St. James's Park

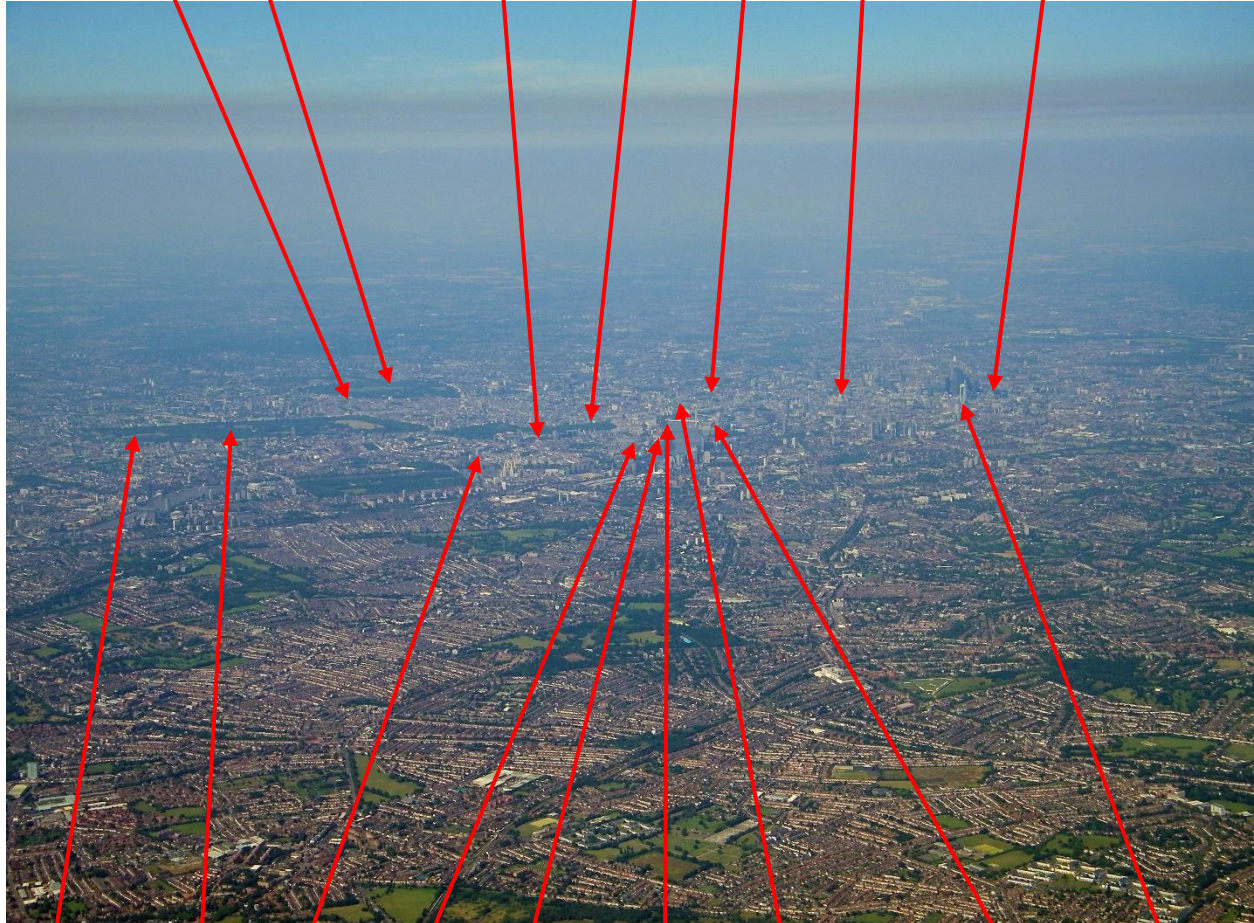
St. Paul's Cathedral

Regent's Park

Buckingham Palace

Covent Garden

Tower of London



Hyde Park

Parliament &
Big Ben

Trafalgar Square
incl National Gallery &
National Portrait Gallery

London Eye

Kensington Palace

Westminster Abbey

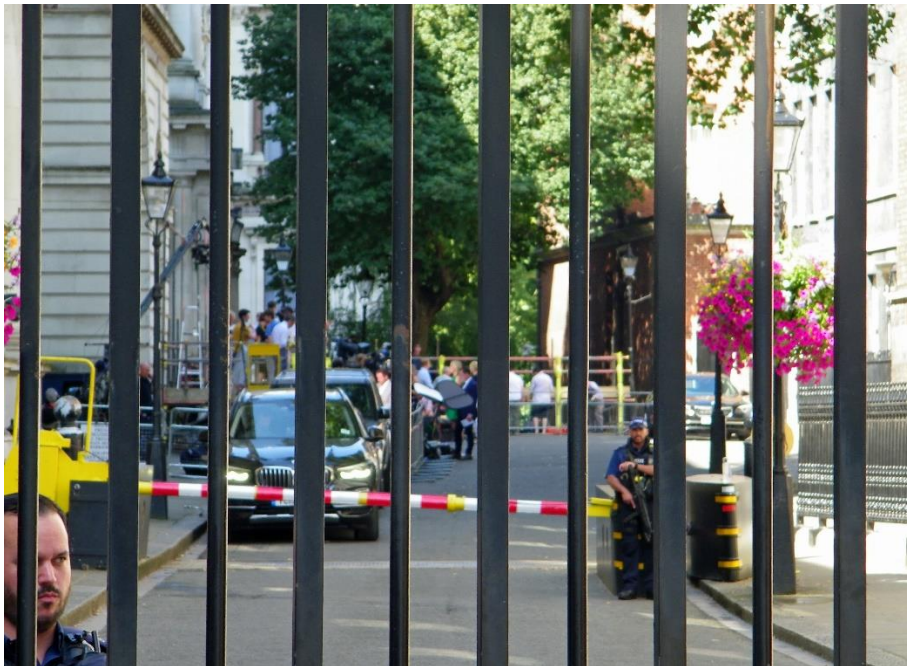
The Shard

Mr. Chippies World Famous Fish & Chips

No. 10 Downing Street



River Thames from Waterloo Bridge. Parliament and Big Ben are center left, but you don't see much of Big Ben. It's under wraps while a multi-year cleaning and restoration effort is underway.



View towards a press gathering in front of No. 10 Downing Street. This was the day that Boris Johnson took over as British Prime Minister.

After getting back from a Saturday night of clubbing at about 5AM, I planned on an easy day Sunday. This included a walk through St. James's Park, past Buckingham Palace, and through Hyde Park.



It was July 7, the 14th anniversary of the 2005 terrorist bombings of London's transportation network during morning rush hour. 52 people were killed. This is the 7 July Memorial in Hyde Park, which pays tribute to the victims of that attack.



The gate in front of Kensington Palace at the southwest corner of Hyde Park. It is currently the official residence of Will & Kate as well as some of the other royals. It was the official residence of Princess Diana until her 1997 death. She would have turned 58 on July 1, so several people left cards and flowers in her memory at the gate (albeit far fewer than I saw back in 2003).



Causton Road leads to Causton, the county town for Midsomer, murder capital of the UK, as fans of the popular British TV series Midsomer Murders know. Causton is home to Causton CID where Detective Chief Inspector Tom Barnaby and later his cousin Detective Chief Inspector John Barnaby work.

Midsomer was the target of my first day trip.

Actually, Causton and Midsomer are fictional places. Most filming locations used in the series can be found in the small towns and villages of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. My actual target was Beaconsfield, in Buckinghamshire, easily reached by train from London's Marylebone Station.

"Small Mercies" was one of the first episodes of Midsomer Murders I saw. The first body was tied down Gulliver-like in a model village, which I later learned was Bekonscot, the oldest model village in the world. I like large-scale model railroads, which drew me to Bekonscot, although I found that it's really more about the village than the train layout.

Bekonscot was started by Roland Callingham in the 1920s. It has been run as a non-profit by the Church Army since 1978. Several million dollars have been raised for charity from the more than 14 million visitors to Bekonscot over the years.



Scenes from Bekonscot



The congregation of the Parish Church of St. Mary's and All Saints in Beaconsfield has been meeting for more than 800 years, although the church building is generally much newer. It is one of several places in Beaconsfield that have appeared in more than two dozen episodes of Midsomer Murders.



Beaconsfield is also home to the National Film & Television School. Popular animated pair Wallace & Gromit were created there. Former British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli and poet Robert Frost are among the city's past residents. Bee Gee Barry Gibb is a current resident.

My second day trip was to Hampton Court Palace, reached by train out of Waterloo Station. Hampton Court Palace was gifted to Henry VIII, who converted it into a royal palace and his primary residence.

As history buffs know, Henry VIII is famous for having married the widow next door. She'd been married seven times before. And every one of them was an Henry (Henry!). She wouldn't have a Willy or a Sam (No Sam!).

Of course, Henry himself was married six times in his quest to produce a male heir. It was the pope's unwillingness to annul Henry's first marriage that led to the English Reformation, which separated the Church of England from the Catholic Church. It also led to the dissolution of convents and monasteries, the proceeds from which paid for a lot of Henry's extravagances.

Later King William III (of William & Mary fame) rebuilt and enlarged Hampton Court with the aim of it rivaling the Palace of Versailles. The first two King Georges of the House of Hanover also resided here.



Hampton Court Palace, as seen from my plane as I was approaching London's Heathrow Airport



The West Gate entrance to Hampton Court Palace

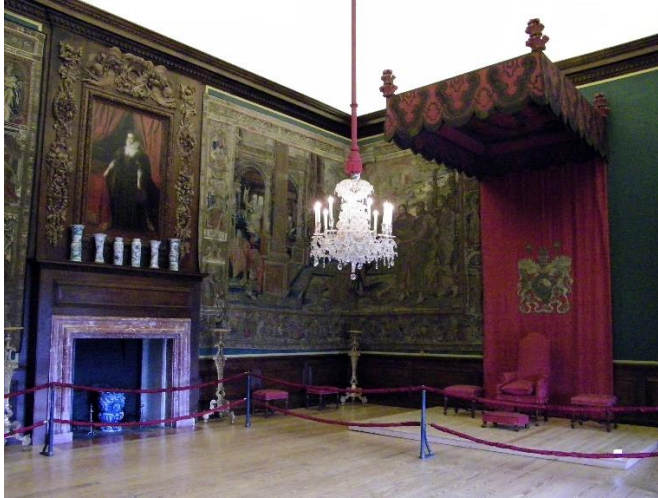


Fountain Court, inside the Hampton Court Palace complex



Part of the chocolate kitchen, added in 1690. Chocolate was quite the luxury back then, and William and Mary were especially fond of it.

You can have your mancaves. I think I've found a better purpose for my spare room.



People who had business before the court might be granted an audience with the king in this room in William's apartments.



Another royal throne in King William's apartments



Part of the Georgian Rooms in the palace



Hampton Court Palace from the Great Fountain Garden



Hampton Court Palace from the Privy Garden

I usually have a list of museums for rainy days, but I had only one rainy day in London. So I checked out the National Gallery for the first time.

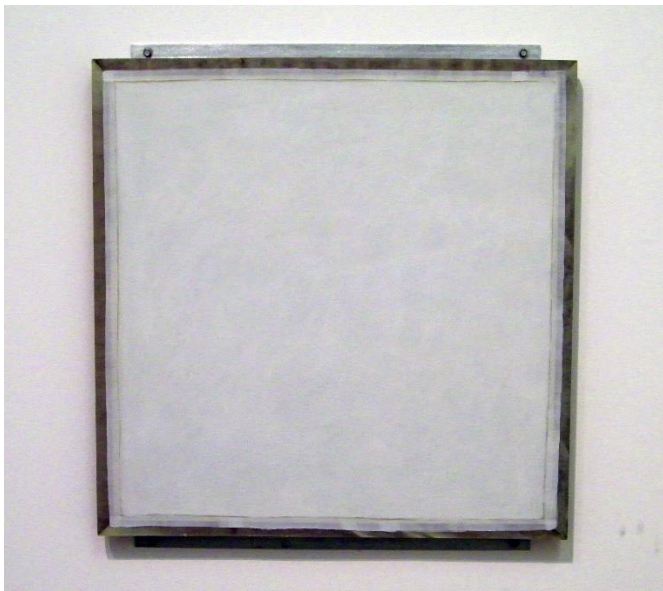


A self-portrait by Rembrandt. There were pieces by a number of well-known artists as well as some that I simply just liked.

On a sunny day I checked out Tate Modern. I'm not a big fan of modern art. I can appreciate the creativity behind many of the works I see, but I rarely have any sort of mental connection with them.



This is actually an art installation – Yinka Shonibare’s “British Library”, and one of my favorites in the museum. 2700 books are bound in African wax print fabric, and each has the name of a first or second-generation immigrant to the UK printed on its spine. The computers access a website that presents various viewpoints on immigration.



At the other end, Robert Ryman’s “Ledger” is the latest white-painted canvas I’ve come across in an assortment of art museums. I wish some enterprising museum would curate an exhibition of a number of these to explain how they differ from one another and why museums acquire them in the first place. Because I really don’t get these. (The Tate in fact did display a collection they called “Painting with White”, but there were obvious differences in shapes and textures that even I easily noticed.)

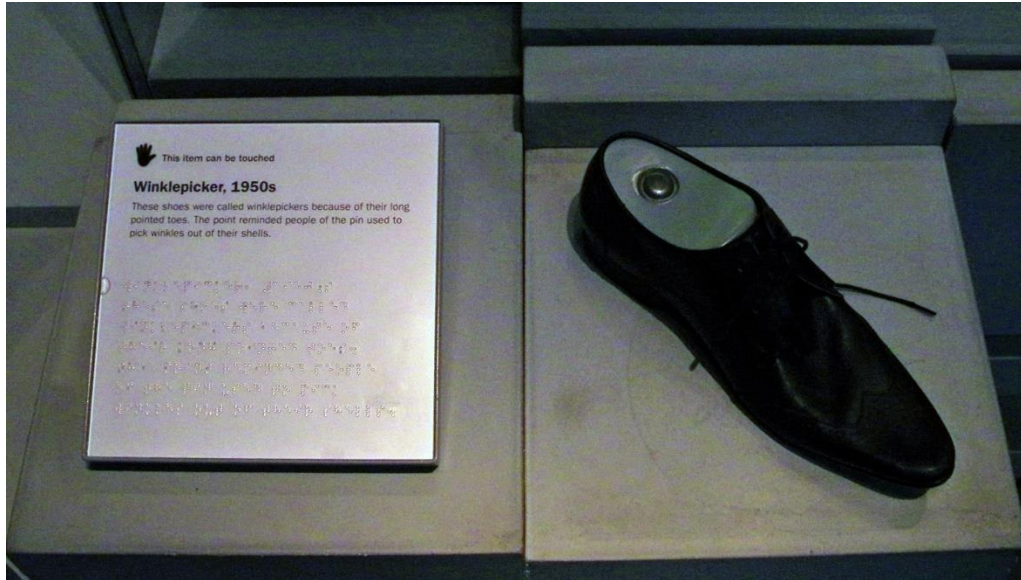


Tate Modern's top floor features a viewing deck, although it's so much lower than the one atop the Shard that you don't see a whole lot. This view features the skyscrapers of The City (including the Walkie Talkie and a glimpse of the Gherkin high-rises) on the left and the Shard on the right. The Tower of London is barely identifiable center-right.

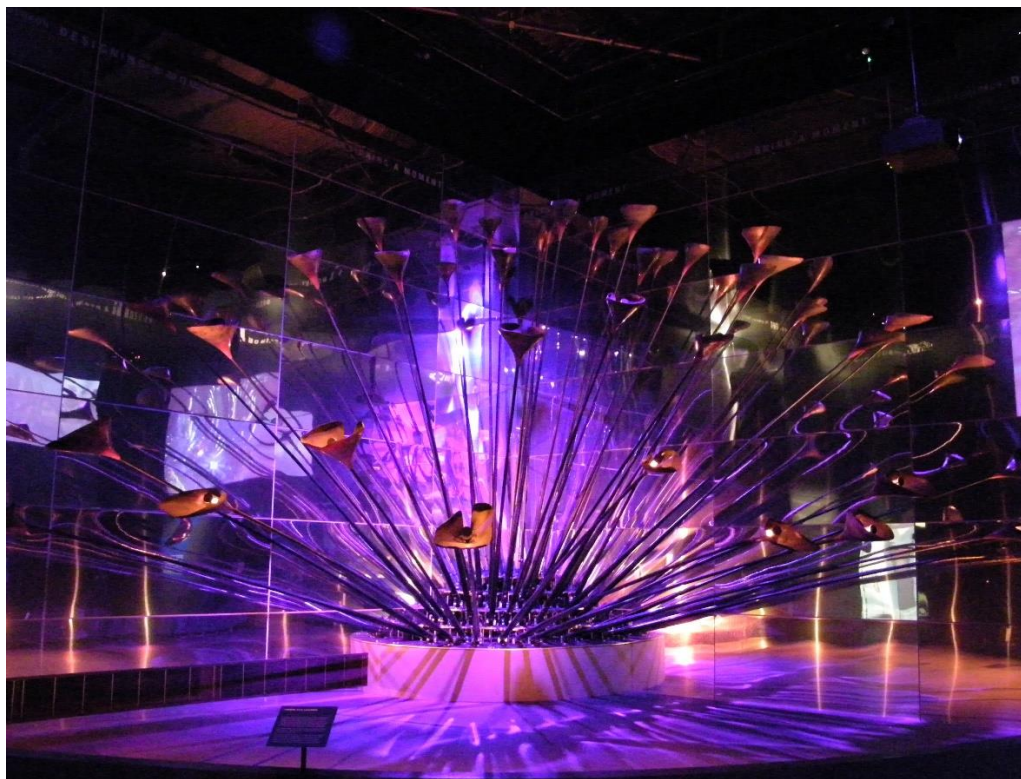


The Tate does feature a great view of St. Paul's Cathedral

I made a return visit to the Museum of London because of my focus on Roman London. But the museum provides a nice overview of London's complete history from early times to present day, and is certainly worth a revisit.



From more recent times, a winklepicker shoe, popular in the 1950s



Part of a display on the flame cauldron used in the 2012 London Summer Olympics

The 2019 London Pride parade drew an estimated 1.5 million people to central London to watch a 5-hour long parade. I watched much of it from Piccadilly Circus looking up Regent Street.



Our hostess for this segment of the parade route





Not Queen Elizabeth, but one of many British queens participating in the parade



The British Royal Air Force gave a fly-over. Contingents representing the British Army, the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Air Force all marched in the parade.



As did British celebrities. I recognized actor Sir Ian McKellen (green pants).



The parade brought back memories of the Americana Festival 4th of July parades I used to attend back when I lived in Centerville, Ohio



Crowds packed Old Compton Street in Soho, the historic heart of gay London

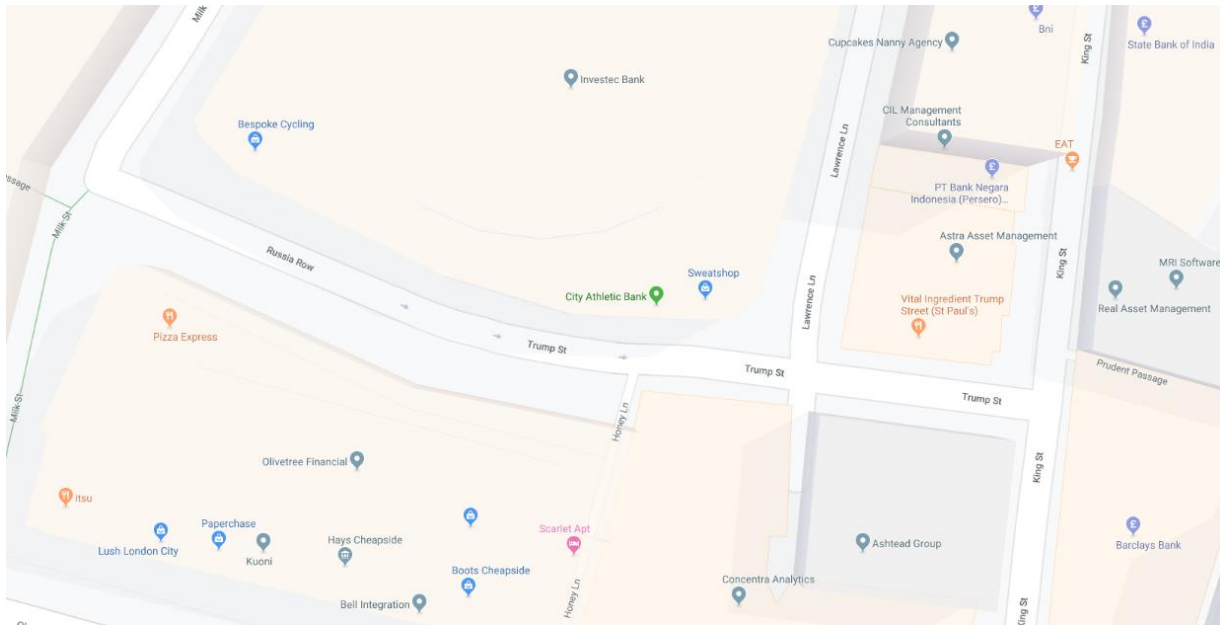


Big crowds also filled Trafalgar Square and the surrounding streets, including The Strand. RELX Group's (a.k.a. Reed Elsevier, my former employer) London headquarters are in the building on the right.



While exploring central London I was surprised to come across Trump Street.

If President Trump fans visiting London want to get a picture of this street sign, Trump Street is easy to find. Just head down Russia Row – Russia leads directly to Trump. Really.



©Google Maps

But if you want to head down Prudent Passage, skip Trump – the two never meet.

(For political balance, I kept an eye out for an Ocasio-Cortez Street in London, but I didn't find one. There is a London modeling agency called The Squad, though.)

No Trump Street in Colchester, but I did find myself on Butt Road.



Looking up Butt. My colonoscopy doctor liked this picture – no polyps!



A Butt crack

I know, I know. It's juvenile to use this unfortunately named street as the butt of my jokes.



Stereotypical London scene – double-decker buses and a red phone booth



London movie theatre



John Logie Baird invented an early form of television and first demonstrated it in a building in London's Soho neighborhood. Evidence that a Baird has been watching TV from the very beginnings of television.



I suppose it's easier to just put out the sign than it is to actually clean the bathroom.

I wonder where I could find one of those signs. Well, 2 ½ of those signs.