

Nature & Culture in London (11, 12 & 18 May 2026)



Regent's Park, London

Note: all photos are my own, unless otherwise specified.

Monday 11 May 2026

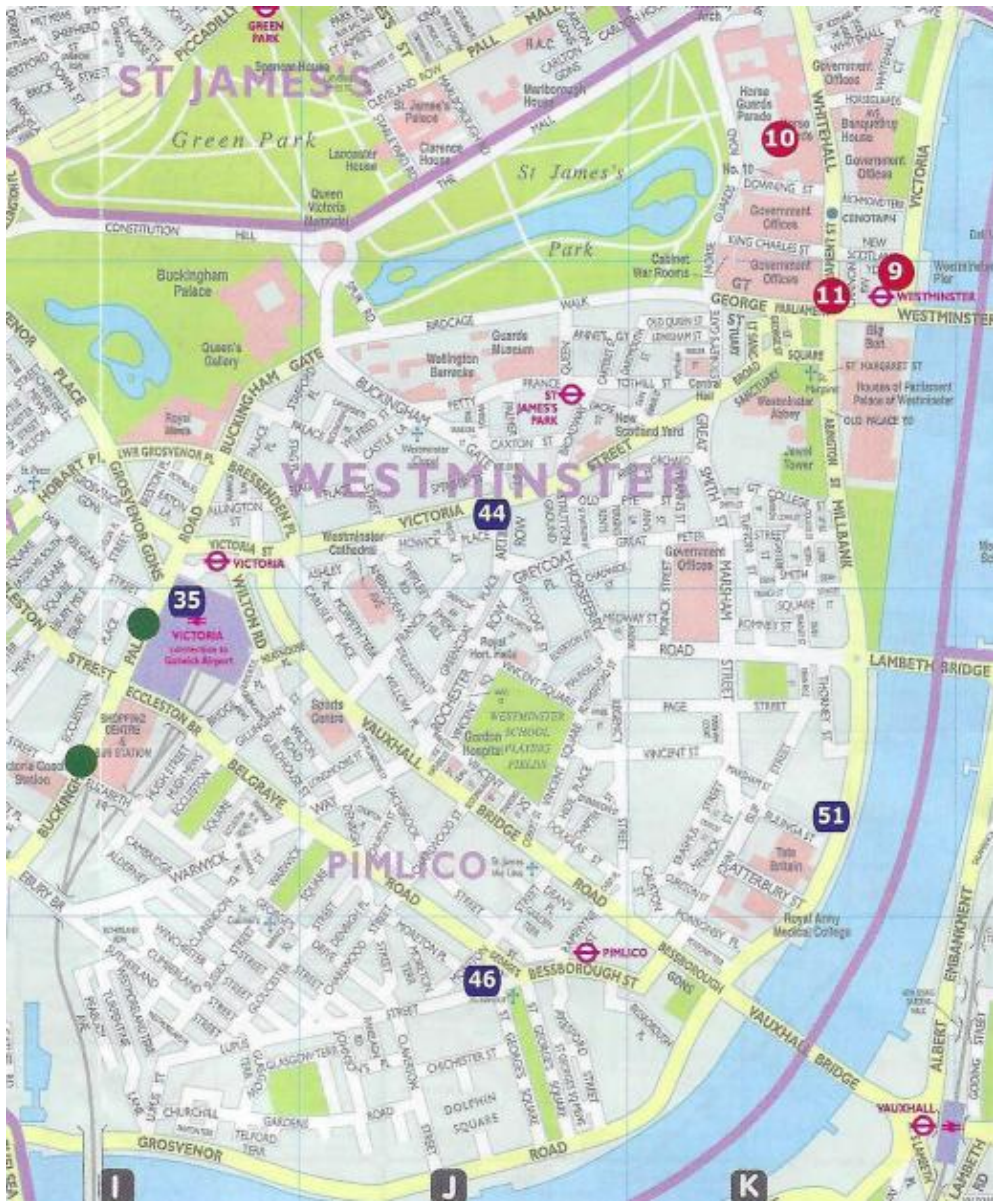
I arrived at London Saint-Pancras International on Monday at 12:40. I took the underground (Victoria line) to Pimlico station. I had booked an accommodation for two nights at Melbourne House Hotel¹ conveniently located between Pimlico and Victoria. Indeed, the meeting point to take a Rabbies' minibus the following Wednesday, to visit Wales, was near Victoria railway station.



Typical terraces in Belgrave Road and Eccleston Square

All the area was developed around the 1840s with a spectacular homogeneity, which gives these terraced buildings a sober, yet impressive, elegance. Like Melbourne House, many buildings in that part of Belgrave Road have been converted in small hotels (without lift!). After checking in and refreshing myself with some tea and biscuits, I was ready to explore the area, starting with the Tate Gallery, at 10 min walking distance. At the end of Belgrave Road, I turned on the left-hand side towards Bessborough Street then John Islip Street, where stand the Chelsea College of Arts, and on the other side of Atterbury Street, the Tate Gallery (see map next page). This museum is so big that I would recommend exploring it by bits. Access to permanent collections is free, and you can prepare your visit in advance through their website: <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain>. Many years ago, I visited the rooms dedicated to J.M.W. Turner there, and in Fall 2019, I travelled to London especially to see an exhibition of William Blake's drawings at the Tate Gallery.

¹ Melbourne House: 79 Belgrave Road, Pimlico, London. Email address: reception@melbournehousehotel.co.uk



Millais's statue, back of the Tate Gallery



Chelsea College of Arts

This time, I wanted to see the paintings in Room 1, "Exiles and Dynasties 1545–1640," for my present research, and some of the best known pre-Raphaelites' paintings for pure pleasure:



J. E. Millais, *Christ in the House of his Parents*, 1849-50



J. E. Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-52



W. H. Hunt, *Our English Coasts*, 1852



J. W. Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott*, 1888

When I left the Tate Gallery, I decided to walk towards the Palace of Westminster along the Thames, on Millbank then Abington Street. I passed by impressive buildings, then took a stroll into Victoria Tower Gardens, where we can see Buxton's memorial and the back of the Houses of Parliament:



Buildings on Millbank



Buxton's memorial to the Emancipation of Slaves (1834),
Victoria Tower Gardens



Back of Westminster Palace, as seen from Victoria Tower
Gardens

In Abington Street, I passed by the Houses of Parliament and the back of Westminster Abbey, up to Big Ben (seen from a distance):



Houses of Parliament, Abington Street



Back of Westminster Abbey, Abington Street



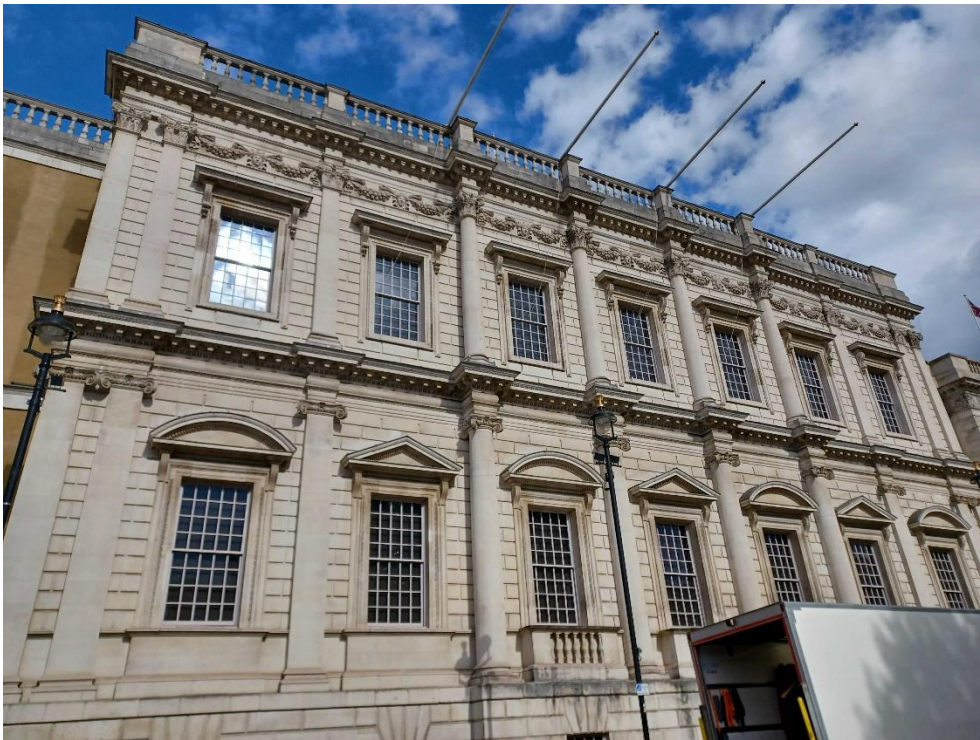
Big Ben from Abington Street

Crossing the street, I went on Parliament Street, then Whitehall, towards Trafalgar Square:



Parliament Offices, in Parliament Street

My aim was to take a photo of the Banqueting House (1619-22), designed by Inigo Jones. Though it was closed to visitors, I wanted at least to examine the exterior architecture. Sadly, there was an event organized in the building that night, and a lorry downloading furniture obstructed the view...



Banqueting House, Whitehall

Opposite the Banqueting House stands the Horse Guards building, dating from the 18th century and designed by William Kent. It leads to the Horse Guards Parade, the ceremonial parade ground in St. James's Park and the scene of Trooping the Colour on the King's official birthday in June:



Horse Guards entrance, from the Parade



A view of the Horse Guards Parade

Though the royal palace of Whitehall (but the Banqueting House) was destroyed in a fire in 1698, the area developed in the following centuries as a centre for government. Most buildings facing Whitehall are listed. St James Park, initially acquired by Henry VIII for hunting, lies opposite Horse Guards Road. I then promenaded around the park on Birdcage Walk then went on Buckingham Palace Road up to Victoria station.



Duck Island Cottage, on Birdcage Walk



This canal in St James's Park was dug for the enjoyment of King Charles II

Around my hotel in Belgrave Road there were several restaurants and food shop, including quite a big Sainsbury's supermarket. As the hotel did not provide for breakfast in the mornings, the owner recommended me The Roasting, when I asked for a place to get some good coffee.²

Tuesday 12 May 2026

That day I wanted to go to Richmond to visit a Jacobean building, Ham House, for my research. At Victoria, I took the underground District line which drove me directly to Richmond in a little more than 40 min. In the station hall, I asked for information at the tourist desk, where they provided me with a detailed map and directions. It was such a beautiful day, I decided to follow the bucolic path along the Thames to the house.



² Coffee shop 'The Roasting', 31 Churton Street, Pimlico



Petersham Meadows

For information, Richmond Park³ may also be an amazing destination for a day out, as well as Kew Gardens⁴, at the underground station before Richmond. I had thought I could combine my visit to Ham House with one of these, but I realized that day that it was not possible. The walk out of Richmond Station towards Ham House took me nearly an hour, so it was almost 11:00 when I reached the entrance of the house, just in time for a guided visit of the gardens!



³ See the website: <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/visit/parks/richmond-park>

⁴ See the website: <https://www.kew.org/>

Ham House was built in 1610, and in 1626, it passed to William Murray, a Scotsman who was brought up at Court and shared Charles I's refined artistic tastes. He and his wife Catherine created a grand ceremonial staircase and a suite of rooms in 1637-9. After the Civil War, which had forced William to flee abroad, Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660. Murray's daughter Elizabeth and her second husband, the Duke of Lauderdale, doubled the size of Ham to make it one of the grandest houses in Stuart England, with an elaborate formal garden to match.



The main entrance of Ham House, facing north

We started the visit with the Cherry Garden on the right-hand side of the house, where stands the only original statue of the 17th-century estate, featuring Bacchus.



The Cherry Garden, inspired by formal French gardens.

The view of the Cherry Garden in summer, with the lavender in full bloom, must really be beautiful.



The statue of Bacchus in the Cherry Garden

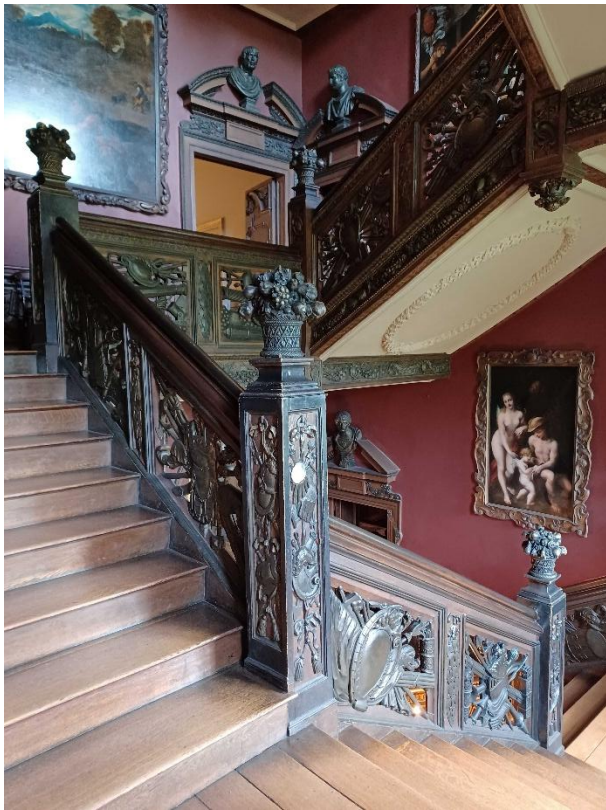


The path towards the Cherry Garden



South side of the house, and the "plats", as seen from the Wilderness

After a refreshing break at the Orangerie Café, I started the tour of the house rooms... Here below is only a very small selection of stunning details in this beautifully decorated Stuart house.



The Great Stairs



Ceiling of the Hall



The Marble Dining Room as refurbished in the 18th century, with its gilded leather panel.



Gardeners at work on the South terrace of the house.

I left the house with regrets in the middle of the afternoon and walked back to Richmond on the same path along the Thames. Many restaurants and cafés make this part of the town very lively, especially near the bridge of Richmond Road:

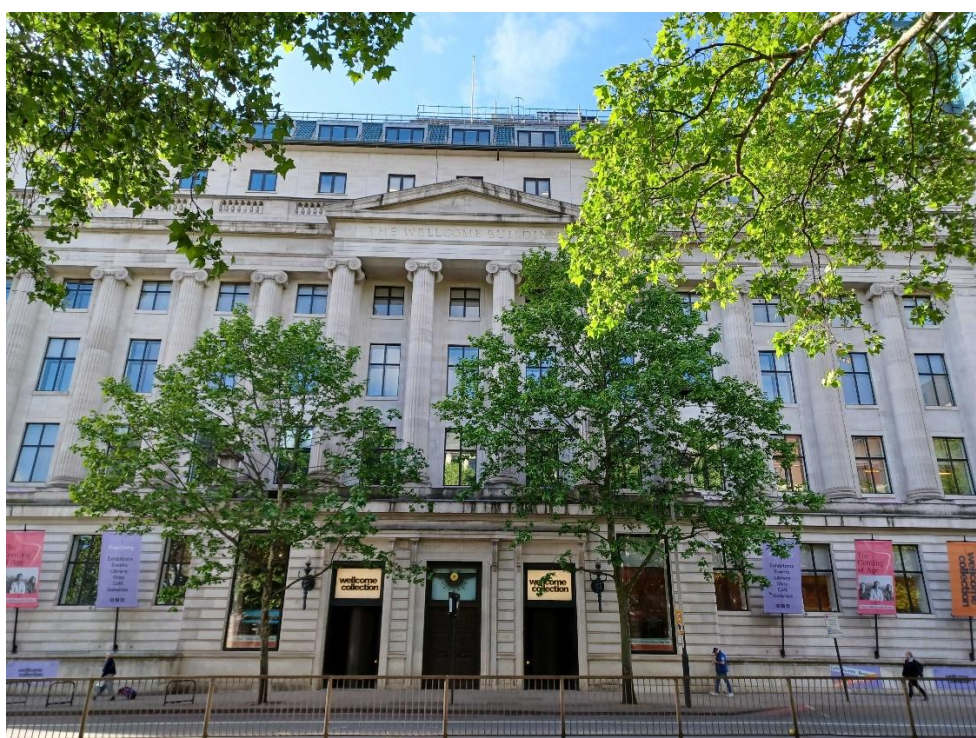


Once back to London that afternoon, the weather had turned quite chilly and grey. After a rest in my hotel room, I needed a real hot meal so, in the evening, I went to a restaurant nearby, recommended by the hotel owner: Cyprus Mangal, 45 Warwick Way: <https://cyprusmangal.co.uk/>. And I did not regret it: the service was good and I ate a delicious charcoal-grilled sea-bass fillet!

Monday 18 May 2026

As I was to leave Great Britain in the afternoon, I had spent the previous night in a hotel near St Pancras: Crestfield Hotel, 3-4 Crestfield Street. The room, though very tiny, was clean and well organized, providing enough space for a short stay.

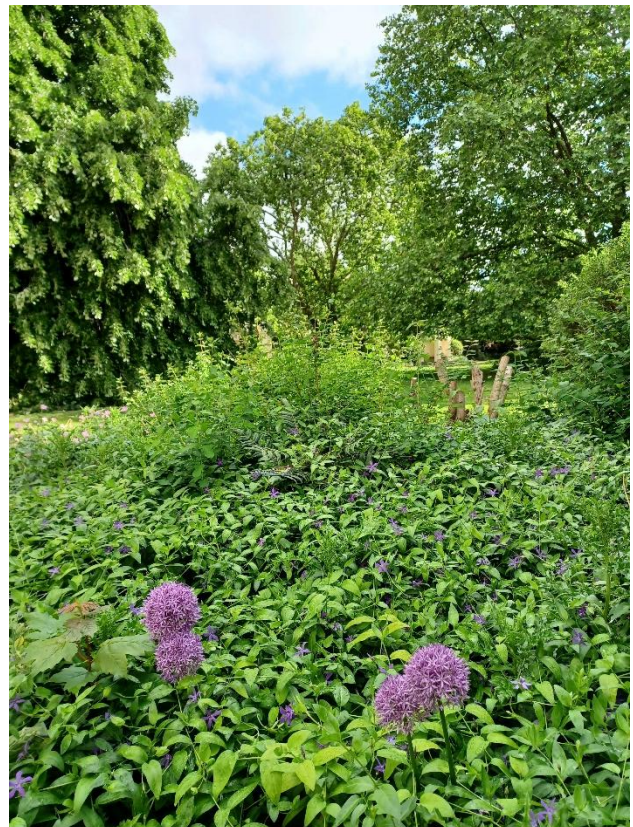
Early in the morning, a clear blue sky encouraged me to leave my luggage at the hotel and promenade along Euston Road towards Regent's Park, that I had not visited yet. I passed by an old building housing the fire brigade, and the elegant Wellcome building:



When I arrived at Marylebone Road, I crossed the street to see Park Crescent, the elegant stuccoed terraced houses designed by the architect John Nash and built under the patronage of the Prince Regent in the beginning of the 19th century. Between the arms of the crescent is a private garden of historic interest.



Detail of an entrance door



View of the private garden



Map of Regent's Park: see <https://www.royalpark.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Regents-Park-Map-English.pdf>

From Park Square West, I reached the entrance of Regent’s Park and followed a path to York Bridge and York Gate:



This royal park is an enchantment, especially as May is the month of roses:



A squirrel, undisturbed by human presence, was looking for food in this bed of roses! I also had the chance to discuss with one of the gardeners who had created a new area with exotic plants, and who recommend me to also visit Queen Elizabeth II's Gardens nearby.



Chester Gate

Regent's Park is the "high-water mark of Regency elegance. Designed by John Nash in the early 1800s, the park is a masterpiece of landscape design and town planning, as well as an enduringly beautiful green space." Read more on the official website:

<https://www.royalparks.org.uk/visit/parks/regents-park-primrose-hill/history#park-menu>

I left the park through Chester Gate, then followed Broad Walk to reach the new gardens which "commemorate the life and service of Queen Elizabeth II" (see more on the website

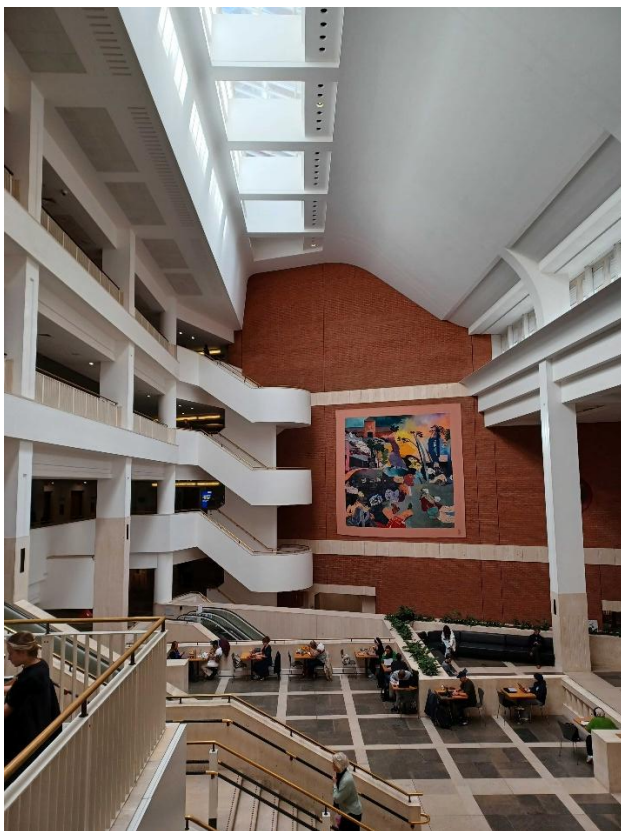
<https://www.royalparks.org.uk/visit/parks/regents-park-primrose-hill/queen-elizabeth-ii-garden>).



When I left the Park, I walked along several splendid, terraced houses, such as Cambridge Terrace and Cambridge Gate, to reach St Andrews Place (see photo below):



Back to Euston Road, I headed to the British Library (BL): its red-brick exterior echoes that of the neighbouring St Pancras railway station: the 10 million bricks used in its construction came from the same source in Leicestershire. It was the largest public building project of the 20th century: “its design and construction took 37 years, and it was the pinnacle of architect Sir Colin St John Wilson’s career.” Read more on: <https://www.bl.uk/>. Open to everyone, the entrance to the library is free. To access the reading rooms, however, you need a reader pass.

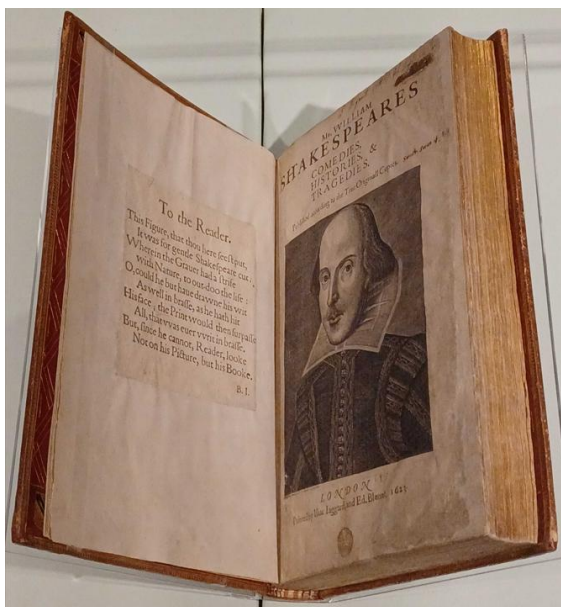


Entrance Hall



King's Library Tower

Like many other national museums, in the BL you must buy a ticket for temporary exhibitions, but access to the permanent ones is free. I visited the Treasures Gallery on the ground floor and saw some of the rare books I was looking for, including *Beowulf* and Shakespeare's *First Folio*. There was also a temporary display celebrating the 500th anniversary of the first complete printing of William Tyndale's 1526 English translation of the New Testament, including Anne Boleyn's copy of the 1534 edition of Tyndale's New Testament and Henry VIII's copy of the Great Bible.



Shakespeare's *First Folio*, 1623



Francis Bacon, *A Naturall Historie*, 1627



Beowulf, early 11th century



1526 Tyndale's English translation of *The New Testament*

After a refreshing break at the library's café, I went to the Reader Registration's office and got a reader pass for my future visits (it is valid for 3 years).

It was time to go back to my hotel and get my luggage for taking my train at St Pancras railway station. What a stay! Once again, I was travelling back to France with a wealth of memories in my brain and a harvest of beautiful images to share on my blog.