

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for choosing to take a self guided tour with Free Tours By Foot. We believe in operating quality tours that are affordable to everybody - regardless of their budget and we hope that you enjoy your tour with us today.

You have chosen to come along on our Royal Westminster Self-Guided Tour, a walk that will take you through this exceptionally beautiful part of our city, telling you the stories of all the Kings and Queens who have shaped the way we see London today. This tour will have you standing at the entrances of royal palaces, walking in the footsteps of British history's biggest names, exploring centuries of history (and gossip), and will finish with an opportunity for you to take a selfie with the most famous clock in the world.

On the tour today you can expect to walk nearly 2 miles or just over 3 kilometres. The tour will last, on average, just under 2 hours. Although this may change depending on your walking pace or the stops you wish to make along the way.

For guests with mobility issues, or those with prams or buggies, there is only one set of steps on the route and there is an alternative spot to place yourself which we will point out to you at the time.

To help you get an idea of the time periods we will be discussing today, we are also including a small chart with the names of all of Britain's Kings and Queens - dating back to 1066 - and the years of their reign. This will be a reference point for you as we discuss various monarchs throughout the tour.

This self-guided Westminster Walking Tour begins near Green Park Underground Station.

When you get to Green Park, take the exit for Buckingham Palace. As you step outside of the station you will see a black water fountain. Walk straight past that fountain and follow the path down through the park. When the path splits into two, take the path to your right.

The path will end on the edge of Green Park, just across the street from Buckingham Palace. If you stand facing the Palace, there should be a long road leading up from your right.

You can listen to the next clip about Green Park as you walk.

CLIP 1 - GREEN PARK & CONSTITUTION HILL

Stretching out over 47 acres, Green Park has a royal history dating back through the centuries. Originally, the land here was a burial ground for the nearby leper hospital, St. James.

The land was bought by the crown during the reign of Henry VIII who demolished the hospital and used the surrounding land here as a hunting ground. Later, in the reign of King Charles II the land here was officially made a public park - although it was surrounded by a large brick wall and could be closed off to the public whenever the King wished.

Before Westminster was truly part of London, this area was essentially the outskirts of town and in the 18th century, the park became a haunt of thieves and highwaymen as well as a popular spot for duelling.

Public access to the park has remained open since this time, and today is traversed by thousands of people each year who walk through the park to get to Buckingham Palace - as you are doing now.

This street is called Constitution Hill - despite the fact that it is not on a hill

and that the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution!

The road gets this name because, in the 1700 and 1800s, doctors told people it was good for their health (or good for their constitutions) to take a walk every day. So very rich men and women would put on their nest most expensive clothes, and travel out to Buckingham Palace - so they could be viewed by as many people as possible. They would casually stroll up and down the street. Eventually, this practice gave the road here its name.

Queen Victoria took constitution walks here, also. But she took hers in the back of her carriage - which is a little bit like going for a jog inside your car. However, Londoners would line the streets in their hundreds to see Queen Victoria as she was a HUGELY popular figure.

For a start, she came to the throne in 1837 aged only 18, she was devoutly religious, and she had been raised in a notoriously strict home. And this was in direct opposition to the two kings that had come before her: her two uncles, George IV, and William IV. They had both come to the throne in old age (George being 57 and William, previously the oldest monarch to ascend to the throne at age 64 - although now surpassed by King Charles III who acceded at 73). Both of them were known for lavish spending, constant eating and drinking, and their inability to provide heirs to the throne. George's only legitimate daughter, Princess Charlotte had died in childbirth aged 21 and William fathered 14 children - but none with his wife.

So when Victoria came to the throne, the public was ecstatic to have a beautiful, young Christian girl on the throne, instead of the two debauched older men that had been reigning for the previous 15 years. Throughout Victoria's reign, her popularity would fluctuate up and down, but by the time she died at the turn of the 20th century, not only had Victoria become one of our most famous monarchs - but she also broke the record to become the longest-serving sovereign the country had ever seen.

This is why, as you may have noticed already, nearly everything in London is named after Queen Victoria! The big white statue with the gold angel on top to your left, opposite the Palace, is the Victoria Memorial. To the left of the statue - off in the distance - you can see a tower rising over the trees with a very tall flagpole on it - that's the Victoria Tower which sits on the edge of Victoria Park, which is right around the corner from Victoria Street. You will also have seen the Victoria Train Station, Coach Station, Victoria, and Albert Museum, and the Victoria Line on the London Underground. All because she was on the throne for over 63 years!

However, in September 2015, Victoria's record was broken by Queen Elizabeth II - who reigned for just over 70 years! We have now begun naming some of our London landmarks after Her Late Majesty and you will see a good example of this later in the tour.

Also, in 2022 The Elizabeth Line on the London Underground was officially opened so Her Majesty now has a train line just like her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria!

Speaking of Victoria and Elizabeth, I now want to show you the building where they spent a great deal of time.

To get the BEST view of Buckingham Palace, stand at the bottom of Constitution Hill with Buckingham Palace on your right and walk forward alongside the stone partitions. Continue in that direction, past the black gate with gold trim, and up onto the raised pathway where there are white flagpoles, just up ahead of you. Walking on this walkway gives you the best view of Buckingham Palace, the Queen Victoria Memorial in front, as well as the flowers of the garden.

If you are unable to make the steps, simply stop in the pedestrianized area in front of the black and gold gates - the Canada gates - and position yourself to face the Palace directly. Or, you may choose to cross the street and stand directly in front of Buckingham Palace. The choice is entirely

yours.

CLIP THREE - BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Here you have your perfect view of Buckingham Palace - known the world over as the home of the British Royal Family.

The first record of a house on this site comes from the 1620s, but the house that would become the core of Buckingham Palace was erected by the Duke of Buckingham in 1703 as a lovely country manor - called Buckingham House.

Later in the 1700s, when King George III came to the throne, he decided to purchase Buckingham House as a gift for his wife, Queen Charlotte. George and Charlotte spent a lot of time here, as it was seen as a bit of a retreat from the hustle and bustle of the court. And it was here that 14 of George and Charlotte's 15 children were born.

Throughout the centuries, the building has evolved. In the reigns of George IV and William IV, the House was heavily refurbished and drastically expanded as it slowly turned from a small country house into a royal palace.

The Palace was then expanded again in the reign of Queen Victoria and it was she who would first use Buckingham Palace as an official, primary, royal residence.

In the early 1900's it was expanded and refurbished by King Edward VII and King George V, bringing the Palace up to the look and design that you see before you today.

Contained within the walls of Buckingham Palace are 775 rooms! There are 19 staterooms, 52 Royal and guest bedrooms, 92 offices, 188 staff bedrooms, and 78 bathrooms!

Although Buckingham Palace is the most popularly known London residence of the reigning Monarch, the Royal Family has other Palaces, castles, and houses throughout the country - which means The Monarch isn't here as much as you might think. In fact, King Charles uses Buckingham Palace more like an office and hasn't spent a single night here since he came to the throne in September 2022.

It's very easy to find out whether or not His Majesty is currently in residence at the Palace, simply by looking at the flag on top of the building.

Contrary to popular belief, there is ALWAYS a flag on top of Buckingham Palace and it is the type of flag that determines whether or not the King is home. Whenever the blue, white, and red Union flag flies on top of the palace, it means that His Majesty is NOT home, because this is the flag of the United Kingdom...not the flag of the King!

His Majesty has her own personal flag, known as the Royal Standard. It's a combination of four squares in shades of blue, red, and gold. Two squares are red with three gold lions (these represent England), one is gold with a red lion (which represents Scotland) and one is blue with a golden harp (which represents Northern Ireland). Whenever you see this flag on top of the Palace, it means that the King is currently in residence. Which, in an odd way, means King Charles can never hide from us - as the flag will always give him away.

To get to our next stop, continue along the stone pathway beside the flagpoles and take a left onto the big red road known as The Mall.

Continue walking away from Buckingham Palace until you can see a huge iron gate on your left. This is your next stop.

CLIP 5 - CLARENCE HOUSE

Behind the black gates, are two large houses. The sandy-coloured Lancaster House on your left, used for Royal functions and ceremonial events, and the white-coloured Clarence House on your right, the official home of King Charles III and Queen Camilla - who both lived here for years before Charles became King.

Clarence House was designed by architect John Nash in the 1820s and was originally built for the Duke of Clarence - later King William IV and has since been passed down through the generations. Princess Anne was born here in 1950, and in 1953 it became the London home of Elizabeth, the Queen Mother until her death in 2002. The House was also at one time the official residence of Princes William and Harry.

Today, the Prince and Princess of Wales (better known as William and Kate) live near Windsor, and Prince Harry and the Duchess of Sussex have stepped back from royal duties and live in California.

While standing here, you will notice two Kings Guard soldiers on the right. (please bear in mind that if the weather is bad, they may have retreated into the little blue/grey boxes which might make them hard to see).

If His Majesty is not in residence, then this is your opportunity to get a view of the Kings Guard soldiers and you should play the following clip, with detailed information on the Kings Guard [here](#).

If His Majesty IS in residence, extra guards are placed in the courtyards of St. James's Palace, which gives you an excellent view and you should play the following clip when you get there.

If you would like information on the Changing of the Guard, you can listen to the following clip as you walk to the next stop.

CLIP 4 - CHANGING OF THE GUARD

One of the most famous displays of royal pomp and ceremony in London is the Changing of the Guard. To keep things simple, the Changing of the Guard is a ceremony where a group of soldiers that has been in position at St. James's Palace and Buckingham Palace are replaced by a new group of soldiers who are beginning their shifts outside the royal properties.

In reality, the guards can change with no music or ceremony - and they usually do throughout the off-season in the winter months. The huge parade, marching band, and ceremony that go along with it are only for the benefit of visitors. This means the ceremony takes place more often in our busy season, April - August. As of recording, the Changing of the Guard takes place on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays in the offseason and almost daily in the summer season. The ceremony officially begins at 11:00 but the troops start to move around 10:40.

The ceremony begins at St. James's Palace - which we will show you later - and the guards approach Buckingham Palace by walking down The Mall: the street you are on now. If you happen to be taking your tour on a day when the ceremony is taking place, we would recommend pausing the walk here on the Mall so you can see the guards on their march.

If you would like more information on the changing of the guard, including our tips on the best places to watch, the best times to arrive, and further information, just check out our handy guide at www.freetoursbyfoot.com/changing-of-the-guard

CLIP 6 - ST JAMES'S PALACE 1

When you are ready to leave this stop, Turn away so your back is to Clarence House and turn LEFT. Continue down the road until you get to Marlborough Street and turn LEFT again. When you get to the courtyard on your right, stop. If His Majesty is in residence, here is where you will see the extra guards. If not, you will be looking at two empty guard boxes.

If you look through the face ahead of you and to the right, you should see two King's Guard Soldiers standing in position. However, if you are taking this tour on a day with wet weather, they may be standing inside their grey/blue boxes to protect them from the rain.

The King's guard is the name given to contingents of infantry and cavalry soldiers charged with guarding the royal family, as well as their property - a job which they've had since the 1660s.

Many people have the idea that the job of a King's Guard soldier is to stand still in one place all day long, not speaking or moving at all. But this is not the case.

For a start, King's Guard soldiers work in shifts of 2 hours each, and throughout those 2 hours, they do move around quite a bit. Every 10 minutes they come to action and do a march of 15 paces before returning to their position. Usually, they only do the 2-hour shift twice a day, but occasionally they may be required to do it three times - but this is the maximum.

It is also worth keeping in mind that all of the Kings Guard soldiers are real - active - soldiers. They all have full military careers like all other soldiers in the army and can be sent on deployment throughout the globe, as any other soldier can. This means that when you see them standing outside the royal properties, it really is just a small part of their full-time military career.

Specifically, all of the King's Guard Foot Soldiers come from the Infantry division of the military, which gives us some more information about them.

Firstly, if somebody is old enough to be in the army, they are old enough to be a King's Guard soldier which means some of them are younger than many people expect. Secondly, Infantrymen are all trained in weaponry so this means that the guns are real. As to whether they are loaded or not...that is something we can't comment on.

Lastly, up until quite recently, female soldiers were not allowed into the Infantry division. This means that - despite the fact they were previously all employed by a woman, the late Queen - no women have ever been Queen or Kings guard soldiers.

But perhaps the most famous aspect of the King's Guard soldiers is their uniform. Specifically, the hat. These hats are known as bearskin hats; as the name suggests, they are made of bearskin. It is real bearskin and most of the skins are given to the military from Canada, from bears that are legally culled. Each hat is approximately 18 inches tall and weighs 1.5 lbs or 0.68kg.

We'd also like to draw your attention to the fact that the hats you are looking at now may have decorative plumes on them.

The plumes vary in colour and position and identify which regiment the guard belongs to.

There are five regiments that make up the foot soldiers of the King's Guard:

Grenadier Guards (white plume on the left side of the hat)

Coldstream Guards (red plume on the right side of the hat)

Irish Guards (blue plum on the right side of the hat)

Welsh Guards (Green and white plumes on the left side of the hat)
Scots Guards who have no plumes.

The most well-known event surrounding these soldiers is the Changing of the Guard and if you would like more information on THAT, including our tips on the best places to watch, the best times to arrive, and further information, just check out our handy guide at

www.freetoursbyfoot.com/changing-of-the-guard

The Palace of St. James is not as well known as places like Buckingham Palace, but as far as the Royal family is concerned, St. James's Palace is number one. This is the senior-most Palace in the United Kingdom. This is because St. James's Palace is the official residence of the Monarch - despite Buckingham Palace being the more famous building. St James is also home to the Court of the King - known as the Royal Court of St. James.

When we say the Court of the King, imagine his majesty sitting on his throne and then, surrounding her, dozens - and sometimes even hundreds - of people, decisions, organisation, and planning. It's essentially the extended household of all the people who regularly work the closest with the monarch.

For many people, St. James's Palace is their first introduction into the sphere of the royal family. All foreign ambassadors and high commissioners who are visiting the United Kingdom are welcomed at St. James's Palace and those ambassadors who represent the United Kingdom are formally accredited here. Even if ambassadors or commissioners are attending events inside Buckingham Palace, they all come to St. James's Palace first, before being escorted down the Mall to Buckingham Palace.

St. James's is also the official meeting point of the Accession Council. The Accession Council is a large group made up of many high-profile members such as members of the House of Lords, Officers of State, Aldermen of the City of London, and High Commissioners of the Commonwealth realms. They have the job of meeting at St. James's Palace upon the death of any monarch as it is their job to officially proclaim the successor to the throne. Obviously these days, they don't tell us anything that we do not already know as the heirs to the throne are public figures, but the ceremony still continues, and today essentially officially confirms the identity of the new Monarch. The last time this happened was the Proclamation of King Charles III on the 10th of September 2022.

It is worth a mention, also, that St. James's Palace is where the Changing of the Guard begins. The guards that are based here will begin the ceremony by leaving this courtyard and heading down the Mall. It's appropriate that the ceremony starts, rather than the more famous Buckingham Palace because THIS is the Court of the reigning monarch.

With the courtyard on your left, continue forward until you get to the end of the palace and turn LEFT. Walk until you get to the big black-door gates on your left.

CLIP 7 - ST JAMES'S PALACE 2

This is the original gatehouse to St. James's Palace, remaining largely unchanged throughout its centuries of history (aside from the clock which was added in 1731). Even though today St. James's Palace is the home of the Court of the King, it was originally intended to be a home for the king and his wife - and this is one of our most famous kings: Henry VIII.

In centuries gone by there had been a leper hospital on this site - the Hospital of Saint James. Henry VIII purchased the land and had the

hospital knocked down so he could build himself a new royal palace on this site.

Construction of St. James began in 1531 and was completed in 1536. Henry's intention was to use the relatively small St. James Palace as a cozy getaway from his larger palaces such as Whitehall or Greenwich. During construction of the Palace, Henry was married to his second wife, Anne Boleyn and he had their entwined initials carved into all of the woodwork inside.

Since its construction, the Palace has seen much royal history. Two of Henry VIII's children died here: His illegitimate child, Henry Fitzroy, and his first daughter Queen Mary I - and Mary's heart is said to be buried in the chapel inside the palace.

In the 17th century, two of King Charles I children were born here (future Kings Charles II and James II) and it was here that Charles I spent his last night alive at St. James's, before being taken to Whitehall for his execution.

After the larger palace of Whitehall was destroyed by fire in 1698, St. James became the principal home of the monarch in London and it was in that year that King William III and Queen Mary II made the Palace the administrative centre of the monarchy - the role it still retains today.

From the mid-1700s, Buckingham Palace was being used more and more by the royal family, although St. James was still their primary royal residence. It was Queen Victoria who would change this.

In 1840, Victoria married her husband Prince Albert at St. James and shortly thereafter made a final and official move into Buckingham Palace having refurbished it up to her and her husband's standards. This move would finally leave St. James behind as the ceremonial - but no longer the actual physical - residence of the reigning Monarch.

With the gates behind you, turn right and continue down this street (Pall Mall) until you get to Trafalgar Square. Cross the street into the Square and stand near the column. As you take this walk, please listen to the next clip.

CLIP 7 - PALL MALL

You are now walking down what used to be one of the most fashionable streets in London: Pall Mall. Built-up during the reign of King Charles II, many wealthy people and noblemen desired houses in this area because they flanked St. James's Park - where Charles II loved to host elaborate parties.

The parties the King threw would often revolve around a ball game called Pall Mall - a game similar to croquet. The area here became so well known for these parties and this game that eventually the entire neighbourhood became known as Pall Mall.

This is also where the King built a home for one of his most famous mistresses: Nell Gwynne. Nell and the king were romantically involved for over a decade and Nell bore the king two sons. After the birth of her second son, Charles gifted her a house here so that she could live nearby the park and he would be able to easily visit his children. Keep an eye out for Number 79 on your right-hand side and you will see a plaque there that commemorates Nell's home.

As the centuries went on, Pall Mall became known for luxury shopping and gentlemen's clubs - such as the Royal Automobile Club (No. 89) which has been here since 1908. As you pass, look to the top of the building where you will see classically carved cherubs...driving early versions of cars!

As you continue on your walk you will pass the Monument to the Crimean War on your left where the most recognisable statue will be that of Florence

Nightengale.

Opposite that on your right all be a statue of King Edward VII on horseback and a tall column with a statue of a man on top. This is Frederick, the Duke of York, known as the Grand Old Duke of York, who had this column here built especially for himself, as he felt he deserved a monument to himself after over 40 years of service in the military. Rumor tells us that those who worked with him likely felt otherwise...

Today the influence of Pall Mall carries on: it is the name of a brand of cigarettes - advertised in their heyday as the cigarette of choice for the discerning gentlemen at the clubs here, and in The National Mall in Washington D.C., which was named after this stretch of road.

Continue on your walk toward Trafalgar Square, and cross the Street on your left to enter the Square and stand by the column.

CLIP 8 - TRAFALGAR SQUARE

You are now standing in Trafalgar Square, a location visited by millions from around the world and considered by many to be THE centre of London. The idea to build Trafalgar Square came about in the 1820s and the idea was to build a quote 'Italian style piazza' in the middle of town. Whether or not they succeeded in their mission is up for you to decide!

The Square is named after the Battle of Trafalgar - a great British naval victory over the forces of France and Spain during the Napoleonic Wars in 1805. For this reason, the square is donated with statues commemorating figures that took place in these victories. Three plinths in the square display statues of Major General Sir Henry Havelock on the south-east plinth, General sir Charles James Napier on the south-west plinth and King George IV on the east plinth. Towering over all of them is the statue of Admiral Lord Nelson - the national hero of the Battle of Trafalgar, perched

on top of the 169ft (52m) tall column, surrounded by four bronze lions.

The fourth plinth, however, is something a little different. Originally, the west-most plinth was left empty as, with great foresight, it was intended to be preserved as a ready-made place to put any future statues or monuments. However, nobody could ever agree on who or what should have been placed here so it remained empty - until 2003. It is now in the care of the Fourth Plinth Commission who have the responsibility of choosing a new piece of art to take up residence on the fourth plinth every year and a half to two years so there is no way of telling what may be there on the day you are taking this tour!

Today, Trafalgar Square is a popular public space, right in the middle of town and a perfect location to host large events. London's myriad parades (Easter, Gay Pride, Chinese New Year) almost always finish with a huge party in the square, throughout the summer west end performances or national ballet performances may take place here. It's a site for protests and celebrations - where thousands of Londoners came to spontaneously celebrate the end of the second world war, and also where the final Harry Potter film had it's movie premiere in 2011.

Cross back over the street you came from and look for The Admiralty pub. Take the small street just to the right of the pub called Spring Gardens. Walk down this road and continue on until you walk down the white stone steps onto The Mall. Cross the street to the statue of James Cook and stand with your back to him.

If you are unable to take any steps, simply cross back over the road until you are facing the Admiralty Pub with Trafalgar Square to your back and turn LEFT. As you walk down, the road will end at a huge traffic junction

take the RIGHT and as you travel around the corner you will notice a huge stone monument with three archways. Go straight through the archways and find the statue of James Cook on your left. Cross the Mall and place

yourself with your back to his statue.

CLIP 9 - THE MALL

You are now standing on The Mall - the purpose-built approach to Buckingham Palace. The building on top of the road with the three arches is Admiralty Arch, commissioned by King Edward VII. Edward's idea was to create a grand entrance to Buckingham Palace - similar to the Champs Elyess in Paris, and it was he helped lay out the plan for these arches, the long stretch of road, and the Victoria memorial outside Palace where you began your tour.

Originally, the road leading down to Buckingham Palace was a standard London road but in the 1950's it was decided to turn it red, to symbolise a red carpet that runs all the way down to Buckingham Palace.

The Mall is the official royal line of procession for many royal events including the Queen's birthday celebrations and jubilee commemorations.

Originally, Admiralty Arch was given over to offices of the Navy, also known as the Admiralty - and if you take a close look at the lampposts lining the street you will see ships placed on top - a subtle reference to the Navy who held their offices here.

Today, the building actually belongs to a Spanish real estate developer who intends to turn it into a luxury 100 room hotel, complete with a private members club and a few residential apartments.

From here, with the statue on your left, walk forward and away from Admiralty Arch. Take the first left and walk until you arrive at the large sandy courtyard on your left.

CLIP 10 - HORSEGUARD'S PARADE

The area you are standing in now is known as Horseguards Parade, named after the household cavalry that work here on behalf of the royal family.

You will notice a large white building in the centre with an archway in the middle. This archway is considered to be the official entrance to Buckingham Palace - even though we are around half a mile away from the Palace. Yet, this archway is still used for royal ceremonial occasions, perhaps the most famous of which was the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton in 2011.

When the couple left Westminster Abbey after their wedding ceremony and travelled to Buckingham Palace for the celebrations, this is the way their carriage came - right through the archway. And if you look back behind you, you will notice that the black asphalt of the road turns red here as it meets the Mall, an extension of the red carpet that runs all the way down to the Palace. This is also where the casket of Queen Elizabeth II as borne to and from her lying in state and funeral at Westminster Abbey.

Depending on when you are taking your tour, it is likely that the courtyard here is completely empty and this is usually the case. However, throughout the year there are events that take place here. In the spring the London Marathon finishes nearby on the Mall and this is where they set up the tents for the runners to relax in at the end and regroup with their friends and family.

In June, we have the King's birthday party here - known as the Trooping the Colour. Over 1,500 soldiers take part in this event, to which the public can buy tickets. Huge tiers of seats are set up around the courtyard and as the ceremony takes place, hundreds of members of marching bands play through the area, flag displays take place and three airplanes fly overhead, leaving trails of blue, white and red smoke as they do.

It's worth a note that we have the King's party here every June - but his actual birthday is in November. This is because all of our monarchs get TWO birthdays! Their real one, which for His Majesty is the 14th of November, and their official one which is always a Saturday in June because statistically, that's where we get the nicest weather.

And for those who are interested in the Olympics, you may have seen this courtyard on television as during the 2012 summer games here in London, Horseguard's Parade was filled with thousands of tonnes of sand and this is where the men and women's beach volleyball competition was held!

Now, to see the Household Cavalry, simply walk through the archway and as you come out the other side, you will enter into a much smaller courtyard. Keep walking forward and you will then emerge between two soldiers on horseback.

Cavalry

Just as with the foot soldiers you saw earlier, these soldiers are members of the military and are positioned here to protect the official entrance to Buckingham Palace. The building that surrounds this archway belongs to the Horseguards and it contains offices, rooms for them to relax when they are not on position, and stables for keeping the horses.

As you stand near the horses, facing the archway you just walked through, take a glance over your left shoulder and you will see a stone building across the street, with the white bust of a man in an alcove above the door.

This is all that remains of the Palace of Whitehall - a Palace that stood on this site for centuries and that was a favourite of many of our Kings such as Henry VIII and Charles II. In 1689 a fire tore through the Palace, and only the building across the street and the name of the palace remain here. As

for the name Whitehall, the street you are now standing on still has this name and the entire area here, with all the government buildings within are referred to colloquially as 'Whitehall' as well. As for the building across the street, the last surviving piece of the actual building, this is Banqueting House. For centuries, this would've been the scene of masques, celebrations and royal pageantry. And in 1649, it was also witness to the only public execution of a reigning monarch.

If you wish to hear the story of the English Civil War and King Charles's execution, go to the next clip. If not, walk back through the archway into the larger courtyard and you will find yourself back in the centre of Horseguards Parade. Now play the next clip.

OPTIONAL: Story of Charles

When Charles I came to the throne in 1625, he believed (as did many monarchs before) in the Divine Right of Kings - an idea that God had placed him on the throne and therefore, all decisions to be made when it came to the running of the country, were his to make alone.

However, parliament, which had existed in one form or another for nearly 3 centuries at that point, disagreed. Parliament insisted that Charles had to go through the legal parliamentary system to do things like raise taxes or declare war on other countries. Routinely, Charles would ignore Parliament and go about his business, raising taxes and attempting to declare war on other countries, entirely on his own. This led to huge struggles of power between the King and Parliament that went on, like a tug-of-war, for years. Finally, this struggle for power escalated and came to a head in 1641.

A group of 5 MPs gathered together and wrote up a document called 'The Grand Remonstrance' which was essentially a long letter of everything the king was doing that they disagreed with. The letter was then circulated throughout the country - with a copy making its way into the hands of the

king himself. Charles was furious and stormed down into Parliament, bursting into the chamber of the House of Commons while they were in session. As Charles didn't recognise any member of Parliament having avoided them as much as possible, he couldn't identify the authors of the Remonstrance from the crowd of politicians sitting in the chamber. The King drew his sword and demanded that the Speaker, William Lenthall (who was in charge of the Commons) point out who was responsible for creating the Grand Remonstrance.

Famously, Lenthall got up out of his seat and bowed in front of the King and his sword, saying "May it please your majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place but as this house is pleased to direct me whose servant I am here; and humbly beg your majesty's pardon that I cannot give any other answer than this is to what your majesty is pleased to demand of me."

Charles was so surprised that Lenthall would defy him in such a manner that he grumbled, and retreated out of the Chamber. That afternoon he gathered his supporters, travelled to Nottingham and there official raised an army and declared a war on Parliament.

The civil war between the Royalists (those supporting the King) and the Roundheads (those supporting the Parliamentary forces) lasted for 7 years and was exceptionally bloody and brutal. It is estimated that 10% of the countries population was killed on the battlefield during the war. However, it all came to an end in 1648 when Charles, having suffered multiple crushing defeats throughout the country, was captured and arrested by Parliament.

King Charles was from then on referred to only as Charles Stuart and he was forced to undergo a humiliating public trial. He was charged with treason - the act of betraying ones country. This claim was brought against

him as Parliament agreed that as King, it was Charles' duty to protect the people of his country and he had betrayed them, by leading them into an unnecessary civil war, where 10,000's of them would be killed.

And considering it was parliament who defeated him on the battlefield and parliament who were also conducting the trial, it's not surprising to hear that, of course, they found him guilty. And the punishment for treason is death.

So in on the 29th January of 1649, Charles Stewart was taken to St. James's Palace for his final evening alive. On the morning of the 30th, Charles was put into a cart drawn by mules through the street for all the public to see. Crowds of thousands had turned up to jeer him as he was paraded through the streets, and many people followed his cart, cheering, as he was taken to his final destination.

Charles was taken to the Palace of Whitehall and just here outside Banqueting House a scaffold had been erected and waiting on top of the scaffold was an executioner and an axe. As it was January, and quite cold, Charles requested that he be allowed to wear two shirts as he stepped onto the scaffold. He was afraid that he would shiver in the cold air, and the public would mistake that for weakness or terror at what he was about to face. His wish was granted, and wearing both shirts, King Charles stepped out of the window that you see above the door of the Banqueting House, onto the scaffold that was erected here.

On the 30th of January 1649, at exactly 2:00pm, the axe fell and Charles Stewart was beheaded by his own government, all in front of a crowd of thousands who had come to watch the execution of a king.

We commemorate Charles's execution here in one of the smallest memorials in all of London. If you look at the clock on top of the Horseguards building you will notice that next to the numeral 2, there is a small black mark. This mark is the lasting testimony to the fact that it was at

2:00 here that Charles I was elected all those centuries ago and it is the bust of King Charles that sits above the doorway of the Banqueting House - forever gazing upon the site where he met his untimely end.

Now walk back through the archway into the larger courtyard and you will find yourself back in the centre of Horseguards Parade.

Despite the fact that this courtyard is named after the Horseguards, there are many buildings here that have nothing to do with the Household Cavalry.

Facing the archway, to your back left is a large concrete building covered in vines. This is the Citadel - a world war II bunker built to be right in between Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament. Although never used during the war, today it has an important role as the communications centre of the Admiralty.

Moving along, the long building with the two green domes is Admiralty House, previously used by the Navy but today being used by various governmental departments.

If you are still facing the arch and look to your right you will see huge white stone buildings going down the road. These are governmental buildings, places like The Home Office, The Foreign Office and the Treasury. We will be walking along these buildings in a few moments so you can get a closer look. But first you will see between where you are standing and those large white buildings there is a brown brick fence with barbed wire on the top and brick houses just behind it. You will also likely see two armed police officers with automatic weapons. Despite the potentially imposing view, walk closer to that wall.

Downing Street

You are now looking into the backyard of Number 10 Downing Street, the home of our Prime Minister. Originally, Downing Street was constructed on the orders of Sir George Downing who had a mansion here and who wanted to add a series of townhouses on the street - perhaps as many as 20 of them although there are no firm records to know for certain.

The first known political resident of Number 10 Downing Street was Johann Caspar von Bothmer, Premier Minister of the Kingdom of Hanover, head of the German Chancery and an advisor to the German-born King George I. When Bothmer died in 1732, the house was offered to Sir Robert Walpole, a government minister who held the title First Lord of the Treasury. Walpole had worked exceptionally closely with King George I, as he was one of the few British politicians who could speak Latin, a necessity as King George resolutely refused to learn to speak English, but could converse in Latin. As Robert worked closer and closer with the King he soon became known as the 'prime minister' or the top minister - the minister who was working with the King.

As a sign of gratitude for all of Robert's hard work and services to the nation, the King gifted No 10 to Robert as a gift. However, Robert believed accepting the gift would be inappropriate and suggested that he would live there whilst he was working with the king, but when that ceased, the house should go to the next First Lord of the Treasury. As the years have gone on, the Office of the First Lord of the Treasury has become entwined with the job of the Prime Minister, making them one in the same, and making Number 10 the home of every Prime Minister of the United Kingdom...almost. Many Prime Ministers have actually lived in number 11 - as that house is much larger. But their official residence would remain next door, at No 10.

To get a glimpse onto the street itself, as you face the backyard turn right. When you get to the street with the statue of Lord Mountbatten on your left, turn left. A few steps down you will see a huge iron gate and more officers

with automatic weapons. This is the west entrance of Downing Street.

It is worth it, at this time, to make a quick visit to the beautiful St. James's Park. With Downing Street behind you, simply walk straight ahead and carefully cross the road.

CLIP 11 - ST JAMES'S PARK

St. James's Park is one of the most picturesque parks in London. Just like Green Park, St. James's Park was also a huge plot of land purchased by King Henry VIII. He bought the land here around the same time he purchased the Palace of Whitehall, where you were standing just a few minutes ago. Also similar to Green Park, St. James's Park was opened to the public by King Charles II who used it to entertain guests and his mistresses.

Throughout the 17th century, the park would gain notoriety as a place of lecherous and lewd behaviour - as being on the outskirts of London meant there were few people here to monitor what the public got up to, and the many shrubs and trees in the park were perfect hiding places for people to carry out illicit deeds!

St. James's Park also is said to have a resident ghost - perhaps once a victim of the illicit deeds done here. In the 19th century a soldier, based at the barracks nearby, murdered his wife and attempted to hide her decapitated body in the lake. He was caught, but it is said by many that her spirit remains here.

We have two recorded incidents of this female spectre: in the 1804 a Coldstream Guard working nearby claimed to have "perceived the figure of a woman, without a head, rise from the earth, at the distance of about three

feet before me.” His claims were taken seriously as the story of the ghost was already well known at this time.

Later, in the early 20th century, a car accident happened on the edge of the park here - owing to the St. James’s Park Ghost. The driver of the car involved claimed that the figure of a headless woman appeared on the edge of the park and ran in front of his car. He swerved and hit a lamppost, destroying it and damaging his car. He was hauled into court and assumed to be drunk. When he calmed down he explained to the police what had happened and, as the story of the ghost here was believed to be true at the time, he was let go and not declared responsible for the cost to repair the lamppost he destroyed!

To continue with the walk, cross back over the street so you are again at the gates at the bottom of Downing Street, and, with Downing Street to your left, continue walking forward until you see the entrance to the Cabinet War Rooms on your left.

CLIP 12 - CABINET WAR ROOMS

Underneath your feet stand some of the most important war time rooms in the country - the Churchill War Rooms. This was the underground bunker where Winston Churchill led the British forces throughout the Second World War.

Rooms under the Treasury ruling here began to be built in 1938 and were completed and operational by 1939, just in time for the start of World War II. The bunker was fully operational until August 1945 and contains the Cabinet Room, a large room with seats reserved for the heads of various branches of the armed forces as well as government ministers. On first being shown this room, Churchill is quoted as saying “This is the room from which I will direct the war.” And direct the war he certainly did.

Today, the War Rooms are somewhat of a time capsule, the rooms down

here being frozen in the time the second world war was coming to an end. Also attached to the rooms is the Churchill Museum, a wonderful museum showcasing unique pieces and belongings of Churchills, charting his entire life's work. Interesting items inside include a custom made pair of velvet overalls for Churchill to wear when he was spending the night underground, the original door to Number 10 Downing Street that he had replaced when he moved in, and even the flag that draped his coffin during his funeral. For anybody with keen a passing interest in military history or Winston Churchill, the War Rooms are an absolute must-see.

Continue in the same direction until you get to the end of the street. Cross over, turn left and then immediately RIGHT down Storey's Gate. Continue here until you get to the steps on the left that take you into a small grassy area.

CLIP 13 - WESTMINSTER ABBEY

You are now facing Westminster Abbey, one of the best-known churches in the world. The Abbey is sitting on a site that has had a church on it since at least the 600's, which means there has been a site of worship right here for over the last 1,400 years!

The version that stands today was built between 1042 to 1052 on top of the previous version, at the orders of King Edward the Confessor. As time has gone on, however, the Abbey has been a popular project for a lot of our monarchs. Kings would want to be associated with the Abbey in some way after they died so it was very common for monarchs to add to the church, put in new tombs, update statues, replace windows, etc etc. This means that today the church is in some ways like a chronological jigsaw puzzle - a beautiful mix of pieces dating from all time periods from through the last 10 centuries.

Today the Abbey is still associated with the royal family for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it was founded by a King and secondly because

the church is a Royal Peculiar which means it responds directly to the Royal Family and does not answer to anybody else. This church is also where all of our Monarchs - aside from two - have had their coronations (the most recent being King Charles III's and Queen Camillas on the 6th of May 2023) and it's also where the majority of history's royal weddings took place. More recently, the Abbey was where the late Queen married her husband Prince Philip and also where William and Kate got married in 2011. And this is also where many of our monarchs are buried, such as the church's founder Edward the Confessor, Edward the 1st and 3rd, Elizabeth the I, Charles the II and Queen Anne, just to name a few.

It is always worth mentioning, however, that it is not just royalty buried in Westminster Abbey. It is also the final resting place of people such as Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, 8 prime ministers, and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior.

If you would like to visit the Abbey today, you have two ways to do it, either as a visitor or a worshipper. As a visitor, simply go to the Abbey, purchase your ticket on admission, take the audio guide and explore the church at your own pace. Or, if you are travelling on a very tight budget, you can visit as a worshipper. The abbey has services throughout the week that the public are invited to and which are free to attend. To find out when the next service is, simply visit the Abbeys website at www.westminster-abbey.org. When attending a service, you will not be free to wander through the church and see it all, but you can sit down where the guests did at William and Kate's wedding, without having to pay any money to do it.

Facing the Abbey, walk to the left toward the steps that take you out of the grassy area. Turn LEFT at the bottom and walk until you get to the first traffic junction. Cross onto the concrete island and then take the crossing on your left into Parliament Square.

CLIP 14 - PARLIAMENT SQUARE

Here we are standing in Parliament Square, surrounded by the statues of politicians and social campaigners from all across the globe who are considered to have done great things for the people of their nations.

If you look around, you will be able to spot recognisable figures such as Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Ghandi, Millicent Fawcett (the only woman commemorated here, having had her statue erected in 2018) and Winston Churchill. Churchill is probably the most famous Member of Parliament of all time and his statue is the one closest to the Palace, staring straight at it from his place across the street.

As you stand in the square, look across to the huge building opposite with a tower on the far right and the clock on the far left.

You are now facing your final Palace of the Westminster Tour - the Palace of Westminster. You may know this building better as the houses of Parliament, and both would be right. Originally there was a Palace on this site since the 11th century, and it was used as a primary royal home until the reign of Henry VIII when he moved out and into his larger Palace of Whitehall, which stood near to where Horseguard's Parade is today.

When Henry's son came to the throne, he decided to give the empty palace to Parliament. Because Parliament had existed in one form or another for over 200 years at this point but they had no permanent place to work - they had to go wherever the king told them to, and it could be anywhere in the entire country. But from 1547 they have been meeting here inside this royal palace and that is still the case today. The Palace belongs to His Majesty and Parliament meets inside this building with his permission only.

However, this is not the original palace. There was a fire here in 1834 that demolished the original building so you are actually looking at a Victorian reconstruction, built to look much older than it actually is. There is only one

surviving piece of the original palace and it's the piece closest to the road. If you look ahead and slightly to the right you will see one long rooftop that runs all along the building closest to the street. This rooftop sits on top of one giant great hall, called Westminster Hall.

Built in 1097, Westminster Hall has seen many huge events throughout its existence. Previously, it was the highest court in the country and all the major nationwide trials were held here: In 1605 a man named Guy Fawkes was arrested here after attempting to blow up the Houses of Parliament. In 1649 King Charles I was tried here after he lost the civil war against Parliament, and if you remember the film 'Braveheart' then you will be familiar with William Wallace, who also was put on trial here.

Westminster Hall was also the site of coronation celebrations for centuries. Kings would have their crowning in the Abbey then walk across a purple carpet into Westminster Hall for a 13 hour feast and party. All the kings friends and family were invited inside and then regular people, like us, would stand here in the courtyards where there would be massive fountains flowing with real wine. Anybody could grab their cup and come down to celebrate the new King or Queen. Unfortunately, however, they stopped doing that in the 1820s after King George IV hosted such an extravagant Coronation party that he bankrupted the entire royal family.

However, as interesting as Westminster Hall may be there is only one icon symbol of London that everybody recognises from all around the globe and of course I am talking about Big Ben.

If we are being accurate, Big Ben is actually the name of the bell inside the

tower, the tower itself was previously known as the Clock Tower but in 2012 it was renamed the Queen Elizabeth II Tower to commemorate Her Majesty's 60th year on the throne.

Although the Queen Elizabeth II Tower is one of the world's best-known icons, it was originally never supposed to be built. After Parliament burned down in 1834, architect Charles Barry was chosen to design the new Palace. To assist him, he invited another architect, his friend August Pugin, to design the inside of the Palace and it was Pugin who was given the task of creating the clock tower. The Tower would be one of Pugin's last projects before he would die in an insane asylum shortly after the end of his 25 years working on the Palace.

The Tower today stands at 315 ft (96m) high and when it was completed in 1859 it was the largest clock in the entire world. The clock dials are 23 feet (7m) in diameter and contain 312 pieces of glass and are surrounded by a Latin inscription in gold guiding that celebrates Queen Victoria, who was the reigning monarch at the time of construction.

Big Ben the bell was cast at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry (also creators of the Liberty Bell) on the 10th of April 1858. The bell is 13.76 tonnes and at time of casting, was the largest bell in the British Isles.

As to where the name comes from - we don't know for sure. There are two theories. Either it was named after a well-known Victorian Boxer, Benjamin Strong, who had the nickname Big Ben. Or perhaps it was named after Member of Parliament Benjamin Hall, well known for his size and stature who also had the nickname 'Big Ben.'

Up in the Tower, Big Ben is surrounded by four smaller bells that chime what's called the Westminster Chimes every 15 minutes. Big Ben himself only bongs on the hour. It is always the very first bong that Ben makes which is the accurate time.

As the Elizabeth Tower and Big Ben reached their 160th birthday, the decision was made to completely renovate the Tower and the inner clock mechanism at a cost of £80 Million. Beginning in August of 2017, the renovation lasted over 4 years and brought the colours and style of the famous clock back to the original design by Augustus Pugin such as the numerals and dial on the clock face which are now the original blue instead of the black that had been used in repairs throughout the last century.

Sadly, this means the famous Tower is now completely covered in scaffolding. As work progresses, the upper parts of the Tower, including the clock faces, will be revealed again as work progresses, in order to limit the amount of time the dials are covered. Also, it has been announced that at any given time, there will always be at least one clock face of the Tower visible to the public.

As disappointing as this is, it's absolutely necessary as the last extensive renovation of the Tower and clock mechanism inside was 31 years ago. Fears have recently been raised that the structure of the Tower is deteriorating and that the clock mechanism is likely to fail if not repaired as soon as possible.

All tours of the Elizabeth Tower (accessible only to UK citizens) are suspended and will be until the entire project is completed in 2021.

If you wish to visit the Houses of Parliament, you have two ways to do this. You can take a guided tour, which run on Saturdays throughout the year and on various national holidays. These come at a price, which varies depending on if you wish to take the audio guide or tour with a live guide. Or, you may visit the public galleries. This is free to do and the public is allowed inside to sit in the House of Commons or Lords and listen in the political debates.

CLIP 15 - CONCLUSION

From King George III's country retreat, into the footsteps of Henry VIII and along the journey of an executed King, you have now travelled with us through centuries of royal Westminster.

If you've enjoyed your Royal London Tour with us and wish to take another self-guided tour, visit our website at www.freetoursbyfoot.com. There you will find self-guided tours of Roman London, the Beatles in London, the East End and more.

You will also find information on other audio-tours that we offer and also our full tour schedule. Free Tours By Foot offers pay-what-you-like walking tours on a daily basis here in London and we'd love to have you join us - simply book online.

Thank you for touring with Free Tours By Foot today and we hope you've enjoyed every step of your journey.