Walk Through the United Kingdom and Ireland. 2026
9/21/2026 through 11/15

Results of Week 5 10/19 through 10/25

During this week we collectively walked 487 miles and had 19 participants. The miles include 37 miles from the fall dances while the highest number of participants in any one dance was 21. The dance miles included the time the children were playing ball before the dancing started. Sources for photos and other images are given in smaller front near the image. You can click on images to increase their size for a better view. A magenta line on the map for the week shows how far we walked during the week. **Note: This document is copyrighted by K. Scharer, 2026, except where other copyrights are noted.**

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We arrived in London late Sunday evening so the first thing we did on Monday morning after breakfast was to do walking tour of London as a way of getting an overview of the city. We spent the entire week in London and still did not see everything of interest. This 3 minute, 6 second video will provide a brief overview of what we saw.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtWeqZsuzpE

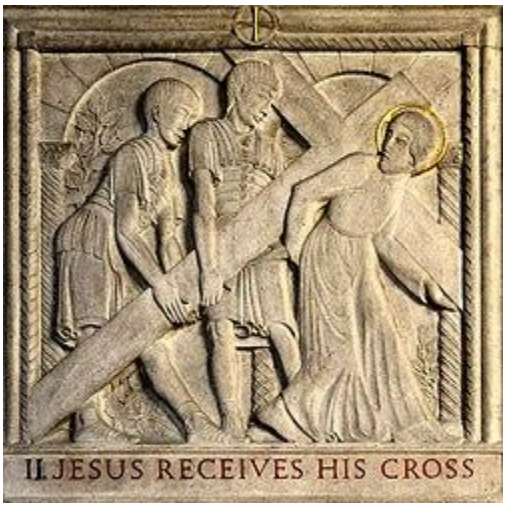
But first some brief history and confusing terminology clarified! In London there are various areas that existed before the city of greater London was formed. In London, there are 32 local boroughs which deal with local concerns; the inner twelve of these make up greater London. However, there is the City of London within London, often just referred to as The City. The City is not one of the boroughs. Instead, it is a county and a government district. The location of the City of London is the site of the settlement built in 47 AD by the Romans. The City of London has maintained the same boundaries ever since. It was called Londinium by the Romans. The original city was destroyed in 61AD by fire but then rebuilt by 100 AD. It was abandoned by the Romans in the early 400's but other groups began living there after that. Then other towns began to surround The City. (The City of London within London is the confusing part! It is always referred to as "The City" and differentiated from the larger Londan by capitalizing both "The" and 'City". Some of the other boroughs you may have heard about are Westminster City (which is both a city and a borough), Chelsea, Kensington, and Richmond upon Thames. Some of the boroughs also contain cities. For example, the borough of Hounslow comprises five major cities: Chiswick, Brentford, Isleworth, Hounslow, and Feltham. Are you confused? Think of Columbia—here we have various sections of our city—NE Columbia, downtown, the Vista, Main St. Five Points, etc. The same is true of London but just as in Columbia, the streets run throughout the city from borough to The City to another borough and so forth.

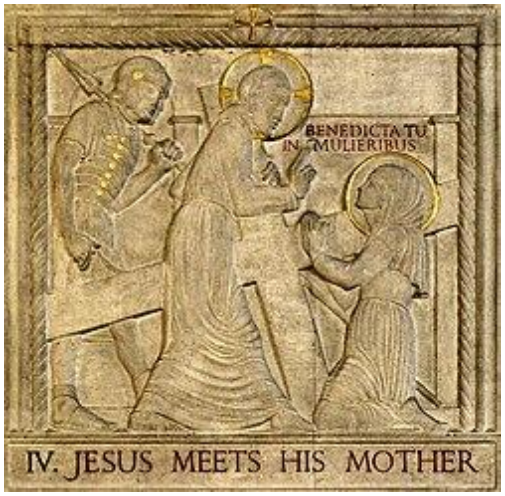
After our walking tour, we headed to Westminster Cathedral, shown left. Diego Delso, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. It is officially known as

Metropolitan Cathedral of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Westminster Cathedral is the Mother Church for Roman Catholics in England and Wales. It is the largest Catholic church in the United Kingdom (UK) and serves as the seat of the Archbishop of Westminster. The Cathedral area is 54,000 square feet; it is 350 feet long by 156 feet wide by 90 feet high. It was designed in Neo- Byzantine style. The foundation stone was laid in 1895 and the building was mostly completed eight years later. For reasons of economy, the decoration of the interior was incomplete and even today it is not fully completed. At that time, no Catholic church could be consecrated until it was debt free and finished, per the rules of the Vatican. However, the Cathedral was consecrated in 1910 despite its interior not quite being completed; it debts had been paid off, though.

While some work continues on the interior, the cathedral is quite lovely. Diliff, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, interior, right. There are lovely mosaics, such as the one left, and much marble throughout. Arpingstone, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, mosaic. The fourteen Stations of the Cross are considered some of the finest in the world. Two examples of the Stations are shown below. AndyScott, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, Station, II and IV.

There is a treasury in the Cathedral which we visited to see rare ecclesiastical objects: the clerical vestments, chalices, and other sacred relics owned by the Cathedral.





An important decoration is the baldacchino over the main altar. It is 31 feet wide, and 38 feet high making it one of the largest in the world. It is adorned with various precious stones. This brief video (3.29 minutes) will show you in detail the interior of the sanctuary area and the Baldacchino. It is well worth seeing a portion of it even if you don't want to watch the entire video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0b2UEf-wbo

One important note, perhaps some of you wondered why as the defender of the Anglican faith (one of the ruling monarch's titles) Queen Elizabeth's funeral was held at Westminster Cathedral? It was not held there. It is confusing because there is a Palace of Westminster with Westminster Hall being part of the Palace. That is where Queen Elizabeth's casket was on display to the public. asimpatel, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, palace left. Her funeral was held at Westminster Abbey, pictured right, which sits next to Westminster Palace. The Abbey (pictured right with interior views below) was originally a Catholic church and part of a Benedictine Abbey. The Palace of Westminster, now known as Whitehall, is the meeting place for Parliament. Antiquary, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right

The Collegiate Church of Saint Peter at Westminster, AKA Westminster Abbey, is Gothic in design. It is where the Royals of the UK are crowned and the traditional place for their funerals, since William the Conqueror in the mid-11th century. Queen Elizabeth funeral was held there here and King Charles III was crowned there.

Westminster Abbey was begun in 1245 and served as a Catholic Benedictine Abbey. Construction of the present church began in 1245 on the orders of King Henry III. The church and abbey were dissolved in 1539 by Henry VIII and the buildings taken by the Crown. It was then converted to the Anglican Cathedral.

Another former Catholic church worth seeing is St. Paul's Cathedral, so we headed there next. This is the seat of the Anglican bishop of London. It sits on the highest hill in The City, known as Ludgate Hill. The first Catholic church built on this site dates back to 604 AD. Mark Fosh, CC BY 2.0 , via Wikimedia Commons, St. Paul's exterior, left. Diliff, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, Nave, right, and high altar, center.

That early church burned in a major fire that ravished The City in 1666. The fire lasted for 5 days before being extinguished. The new St. Paul's was built by architect Christopher Wren and finished by 1710.

St. Paul's was the tallest building in London until 1965. It stands 365 feet into the sky! It is the second largest cathedral in England, second only to the Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. St. Paul's was bombed during WW II but the damage to the building was relatively small compared to damage of other sites. From St. Paul's we headed to another important site in Catholic history, the Tower of London.

The Tower of London sits the north bank of the River Thames. [Duncan] from Nottingham, UK, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left

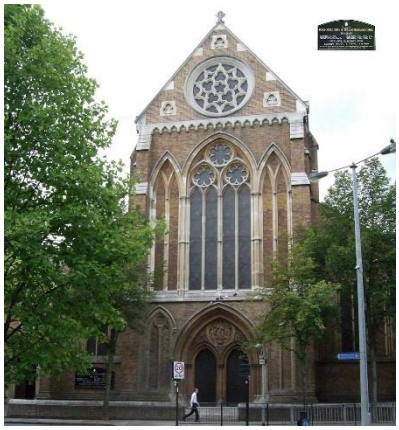
Built in 1066 , it originally served as a royal residence of a Catholic Monarchy. The White Tower, the square building with 4 towers in the right-hand side of the complex, was added in 1078 by William the Conqueror. For the commoners, it was seen as a symbol of repression by the ruling class. The white tower was also used as a prison from 1100 until 1952. Many nobles and others who challenged, threatened, or angered the ruling monarch were sent to the tower. This was true particularly after Henry VIII dissolved the Catholic Hierarchy and imprisoned many nobles and clergy who refused to take an oath of supremacy acknowledging Henry VIII as the head of the church. This included two martyred Catholic Saints, Sir Thomas Moore and Sir John Fisher. Sir Thomas Moore was Henry VIII's Chancellor but refused to take the oath of supremacy to Henry as head of the church and also refused to sanction Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. He was imprisoned in the Tower and later beheaded there. St. John Fisher was Bishop of Rochester, England during Henry VIII's reign and he was the only Catholic Bishop who refused to sign the oath of Supremacy as required By King Henry. Fisher also opposed the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon and became her chief defender. He, too, was imprisoned in the Tower and beheaded a few weeks before Thomas Moore.

John Fisher was named a Cardinal by the Vatican shortly before his death. Both men achieved sainthood as martyrs. Both men were buried in the chapel of St Peter ad Vincula which was in the tower. Both men's heads were temporarily displayed on a pole visible to all who went by but they caused enough disruption that the heads were soon interred with their bodies in the chapel.

The Chapel Royal of St. Peter ad Vincula (right). Samuel Taylor Geer, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

After seeing the Chapel, we headed to see some others of London's Catholic Churches and shrines. Corpus Christi Church in Maiden Lane was the next one we visited; we went to Mass there. Secretlondon, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, exterior, left. AndyScott, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, interior, below, right. In 1873, the foundation stone for the church was placed in position. An interesting note is that you have to step down to enter this church, rather than entering at street level or as many older church taking a flight of stairs up to the entrance doors. The floor of the church is three feet below street level with the goal of keeping it from being too tall. The church was built after Catholicism was again recognized in England, opening in 1847. It is dedicated to Corpus Christi. The consecration was not done until 1956 when the church's debt was fully paid. One of the priest of this parish wrote the hymn, "Sweet Sacrament Divine", sometime in the early 1880's. Over the past decade, much restoration has been done to make this church shine. The restoration not only repainted many areas but also used gold leaf to make it shimmer!

Then we visited Saint Dominic's Priory Church (formally named "Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Dominic"), left. Cj1340, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. It is among the largest Catholic churches in London. Dominican Friars have always served in this church. It was finished in 1883; interestingly it was designed with side chapels for each Mystery of the Rosary, the first anywhere in the world. No Swan So Fine, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right and center. One of the side chapels and the image of the Joyful Mystery. There is a small white sign in each chapel with a printed version of the Mystery that is the focus of that chapel. When the Luminous Mysteries were developed by Pope John Paul II in 2002, there was no room in the church itself but these Mysteries were added to a Rosary Garden by the church.



CHAPEL OF THE ANNUNCIATION

THE FIRST JOYFUL MYSTERY

Then we hopped on the Tube (subway) to visit Our Lady of Willesden Church and Shrine in Willesden, just outside of London. Note to all of you who have a fear of heights: Many of the Tube entrances have escalators as well as stairs down to the tracks and some of these are VERY steep. To me it always feels like it must be a mile almost straight down to the bottom and I grip the railing very tightly, but I am also glad I don't have to walk up all of those stairs on the way out! The Tube depth varies but the average is about 78 feet and the deepest is 198 feet underground!

steve_w, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, eescalator at the Charing Cross station, left.

David Hawgood / National Shrine of Our Lady of Willesden, Roman Catholic Church, left. We arrived near the shrine of Our Lady of Willesden Catholic Church, only about a 10-minute walk from the Tube station. Our Lady of Willesden is one title of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is venerated by Catholics and Anglicans in the greater London area. In fact, there are two shrines about 2 mile apart –one for Anglicans and the other for Catholics. There is a Black Madonna statue that is associated with the Catholic shrine.

John Salmon, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right. The shrine serves as a pilgrimage site for many. Willesden has always possessed a well which was associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, the old Anglo-Saxon name "Willesden" means "Spring of the Hill". The spring or well is believed to have healing powers, one of the reasons that people made pilgrimages to the site. The church and well are of great antiquity and were mentioned in a royal charter of 939.

St. Thomas Moore visited the shrine often with his last visit just a few weeks before his death. When St. Thomas Moore was arrested, King Henry ordered the shrine burned to the ground.

By 1885, there were many Irish immigrants to this area, so a Catholic mission was established to serve their religious needs. The emotional pull of the Virgin Mary became stronger and a local Convent of Jesus and Mary assisted in fostering a renewed devotion to the Blessed Mother. In 1892, a new Black Madonna statue was obtained and blessed by Cardinal Vaughan. The new parish began with 12 members and grew rapidly. The New Church of Romanesque design was opened by 1931 and serves as both a parish church and a National Shrine to the Blessed Mother. After our visit to the church, we went to the well and then took the tube back to London to the Brompton area.

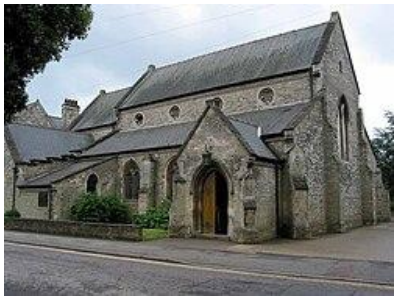
Our next stop was the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, often called the Brompton Oratory or the London Oratory because it is staffed by the Oratorians who live next to the church. It is Neo-classical in design. It is the local parish church for the area.

David Castor (dcastor), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, façade, left. Photo by DAVID ILIFF. License: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/", Nave, below, right.

As we visited these churches were could not help but notice that most of them come from the 1880's or 1890's. The Oratory was consecrated in 1884. Of course, this is because it was in those decades that Catholicism was formally allowed back into England again. And although the ban on Catholicism was lifted in the 1700's, it took time to raise money and time for construction of the churches.

Catholicism never completely disappeared during the reformation but the practice of Catholicism was considered a crime. Denouncing a person or a family as Catholic during that period was considered to being a good Christian! But Catholicism survived, with private chapels in some homes and many larger Catholic estates had a local priest that could be hidden in a well concealed room or space in case of a raid by police. And itinerate priests moved around to Catholic homes saying Mass when possible. Young men interested in the priesthood had to leave England for their education.

Our next stop was St. Etheldreda's Church on Ely Place in Holborn borough. The chapel was built circa 1280 at the residence of the Bishops of Ely. It is named for an Anglo-Saxon saint who built a monastery there in the 600's. It is one of the two Catholic churches still surviving from King Edward's reign that is still in use as a Catholic church! Perferens, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, exterior. Diliff, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, interior



The chapel was used for Anglican worship for a while but was granted to the Spanish Ambassador in the 17th century. Since it was considered Spanish land, Catholic Masses could then be said in the chapel. After that ambassador left his post, the chapel returned to English hands. For a while it was used as a prison. In the late1800's, the chapel, which had been closed, was purchased by a Catholic monk, restored, and re-opened as a Catholic Church.

St. Etheldreda (636-679 AD) is an interesting saint. Her given name was Æthelthryth but is called Etheldreda or Audrey in religious documents or roles. She was a princess, then a wife, then a queen, then a nun and then became an Abbess. In fact, she held all of the positions of power available to women of that time. She had four sisters and they each established Abbeys during their lives. In her first marriage in 652 to a prince, she maintained a vow of chastity she had made as a young woman. After his death in 655, she went to the Isle of Ely which had been granted to her by her late husband. This is a site north of Cambridge in England. In 660, she was married for political reasons to Ecgfrith, who would become King of Northumbria around 670. Apparently Ecgfrith had also agreed to Etheldreda's vow of chastity before marriage since he was not expected to inherit the kingdom but after he became King, he needed heirs. This led to a dispute between Ecgfrith and the Bishop of York, An agreement was made between the two men that Etheldreda could go live in a nunnery as a nun for a time but then Ecgfrith went and tried to abduct Etheldreda from the nunnery. While she evaded the abduction, she went back to the Isle Ely. King Ecgfrith then expelled her from his Kingdom and married someone else. Etheldreda went on the establish an Abbey on Isle of Ely. Sixteen years after her death, Etheldreda's remains were taken from her original site for burial elsewhere. It was discovered that her body was incorruptible and her clothing and coffin were found to have miraculous powers. Her new burial place became a shrine to her and people began pilgrimages to visit her shrine at the Abbey of Ely, now a cathedral. Some of St. Etheldreda's relics are at the church named for her on Ely Place in London.

St. James's, Spanish Place Motacilla, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. Interior photo by DAVID ILIFF. License: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/", right

While St. Jame's church is actually on George street, the site was previously occupied by St. Etheldreda's Chapel which we had just visited at its new site. The current church of St. James is across from Spanish Place which is the site of the Spanish embassy. Because of the previous Catholic ties to the site, many people refer to St. James as being at Spanish Place. It is Gothic design and was built in 1890. The Church still maintains an unofficial connection to its neighbor, the Spanish Embassy. We attended Mass while we were there.

After visiting these sights, it was time for "tourist stuff"! We visited Buckingham Palace first.

Photo:SAC Matthew 'Gerry' Gerrard RAF/© MoD Crown Copyright 2016, OGL v1.0OGL v1.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. The photo of Buckingham Palace also includes the Mall, where all the people are gathered. It was taken during the 90th birthday Celebrations of Queen Elizabeth II. It is the official administrative building and residence of the Monarchs. However, I recently read that The current monarchs are using Clarence house as their residence, right. It is near the Palace and Charles lived there before he became King. ChrisO, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, right.

Then it was time to see the ceremonial Changing of the Guards. The Guards are British infantrymen assigned to protect the King or Queen at Buckingham Palace and St. James Palace. On the days that the Monarch is present in Buckingham Palace, the troop wears the Monarch's color (red); otherwise, they wear regimental colors. Their job is not just ceremonial; they have sentry duties and patrol the grounds in the evenings and night times. During the summer, the changing of the guards is every day at 11:00 am; at other times of the year, the Changing of the Guard happens on 4 days each week, so we made sure we would visit on a day the troops were changing. It is an impressive sight. The following video gives you a brief look at what we viewed! https://www.youtube.com/shorts/SlLSoDDGi5g

Then we took a guided tour of the Palace. Visitors cannot roam freely in the Palace but are allowed in the state rooms. We were allowed to see the Throne Room since no formal events were in progress but we could not take any pictures of the room or other rooms we saw. We also visited the Ballroom which can also be used for State Dinners. The picture of the Ballroom right below is from 1856. Current day dress for women at least would be quite different these days!

daryl_mitchell from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons, throne room left.
Louis Haghe, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, Ballroom, right. Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, horse drawn carriage below left.

There were also a few drawing rooms and a visit to the Royal Mews. The Mews still contains royal horses for pulling carriages and even a few riding horses but the mews are also the current site for motorized transport such as cars and trucks. It is also where the motor vehicles are maintained. The picture left shows the gold state carriage being drawn by eight Windsor Grey horses. The photo left is from King Charles III's coronation. The Windsor Greys are only for use by the Royals, but there are Cleveland Bay horses in the stables that are used for guests and other notable people involved in ceremonial carriage rides.

Next, we headed to the famous British Museum. It is known for its collections of artifacts from all ages in history and from around the world. There are some controversies about the artifacts, just as there are about artifacts in other museums in other major places such as New York City' Metropolitan Museum of Art. One major issue between the UK and Greece is the collection of the Elgin Marbles, priceless pieces removed from the Parthenon and Acropolis in Greece when the Ottomans controlled the area and British archeologists removed the treasures, almost half of the entire contents of the two Greek sites. Once Greece won back its independence, it wanted the Marbles returned but the British Museum refuses to return them.

Jay.M, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left.

There are multiple rooms in the British Museum with similar artifacts from ancient Greece. We enjoyed seeing the beautiful pieces but it would be even better to see them at the Parthenon and Acropolis!

But there was a particular exhibit we wanted to see at the British Museum, the Bayeux Tapestry, which is on loan to the Museum right now from France. The tapestry is 230 feet long and finely embroidered. It has been over a thousand years since the tapestry was in England. The tapestry depicts the battle and victory won by the Duke of Normandy when he invaded England from France in 1066. The duke and his troops killed the English King during one of the battles and The Duke of Normandy was named King of England. This is known as the Norman Conquest. The English Heritage Society conducts a re-enactment of the bloody battle every year. Myrabella, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, scene 57 showing King Harold's death, left.

The Bayeux Tapestry, as it is now known, has also been called the Queen Matilda Tapestry, and the Canvas of the Conquest. It is from the late 11th-century which helps explain the somewhat muted colors in the embroidery. Anyone who has done any embroidery can only imagine how many woman hours it took to produce this tapestry!

After viewing this exhibit, we also visited the Rosetta Stone, and a variety of other objects from ancient to more recent times from places around the world. There are millions of artifacts in the museum and we were able to select the exhibits we wished to see.

We walked across London Bridge, left. However, this is a modern version built fairly recently (1973) and replacing a variety of previous bridges, one of the older one being the focus of the nursey rhythm, "London Bridges Falling Down" which I learned in kindergarten! It is a bit farther upstream on the Thames than the original bridges that existed in this area since the Romans settled here. The series of bridges were once the only way to cross the Thames in this area of what is now London.

After seeing the London Bridge, we visited Trafalgar Square. Ed Parsons, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, left. The Square has a monument to Lord Nelson, the large Column in the lower left of the picture. Nelson (1758-1805) was a Vice-Admiral in the British Royal Navy. He is considered the greatest Naval Admiral ever due to his ability to successfully strategize how to win battles and his ability to choose unusual tactics to win important naval battles in the French Revolutionary war and the wars with Napoleon. Trafalgar Square commemorates a naval battle in the Napoleonic war in October 1805 won by the British Navy under Nelson against the French and Spanish navies at the Cape of Trafalgar. But it also has fascination shops, cafes where you can watch the world go by and an open-air Art display, and we had some free time there to explore the various places in the square.

Our last group adventure was to take a ride on the London Eye. The London Eye is the huge Ferris wheel near the Thames. It moves slowly and provides a great bird's eye view of the Thames south Bank.

Bob Collowan, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons, London Eye.

Finally, we had free time to explore or shop. Harrods Department store was a must for some while others wanted to go to in the various plays being shown in the theaters, while others just want to relax at a pub. London has a very active theatre district with a multitude of plays, everything from the Lion King to Oliver to Les Mis and Cabaret were available to enjoy.

Then we headed south and slightly west toward Oxford which we will explore next week.

Thanks for participating,

Your Tour Director,

Kathy Scharer