

SECRET LONDON

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE

RACHEL HOWARD AND BILL NASH



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

SHERLOCK HOLMES ROOM

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Dining next to the detectives

The Sherlock Holmes, 10 Northumberland Street, WC2N 5DB

0207 930 2644

www.sherlockholmes-stjames.co.uk

Open: Sun-Thurs 8am-11pm, Fri-Sat 8am-12pm

Admission: Free

Transport: Charing Cross or Embankment tube



21b Baker Street is by far the best-known fictional address in London. However, as conceived by Arthur Conan Doyle, the rooms where Sherlock Holmes and Dr John Watson lived never actually existed – at the time the stories were written, house numbers on the street only went as high as 85 before Baker Street became York Place. In the 1930s, Baker Street was extended. The Abbey National Building Society moved into 219–229 Baker Street, and a full-time secretary was employed to answer mail addressed to the great detective.

In 1951, as part of the Festival of Britain, the building society staged an exhibition at its offices, re-creating the sitting room of 221b according to the plans of theatre designer Michael Weight. The exhibition was so successful that it was relocated to New York in 1952. In 1957, it was moved again: brewing giants Whitbread refurbished a small hotel they owned called the Northumberland Arms, and reopened it as the Sherlock Holmes.

The pub is full of Holmesiana, but the *pièce de résistance* is the Sherlock Holmes Room, reconstructed in a closed-off corner of the restaurant on the first floor. It's a little bit odd – you stare through the glass while oblivious diners eat away – but the attention to detail is worth it. There are clues from stories including *The Red-Headed League* and *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*. As well as vials of borax, and Holmes's violin and famous deerstalker, there's a wax dummy of the detective with a bullet wound in his forehead, a reference to *The Adventure of the Empty House*. Of course, the real Holmes survived 'to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents'.

The Festival of Britain

This national exhibition was held in 1951 to engender a sense of recovery and hope after the Second World War. London was the centre of the festival, which must have been a tricky proposition – rationing was in place until 1954 and large parts of the city were still bombsites. Most of the exhibition was temporary. The South Bank Exhibition was demolished (with the exception of the Royal Festival Hall, still going strong). The Festival Pleasure Gardens in Battersea Park have also survived – well worth a visit for their 1950s feel.

BARTS PATHOLOGY MUSEUM

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A potted history of pathology

3rd floor, Robin Brook Centre, St Bartholomew's Hospital, West Smithfield, EC1A 7BE

0207 882 8766

www.qmul.ac.uk/bartspathology

Open: For bookable events and occasional open days. Check website for details

Admission: Varies

Transport: Barbican, Farringdon or St Paul's tube; Farringdon rail



It might be distracting to sit your exams in a cavernous, glass-roofed hall lined with jars of pickled body parts, but that's what students have to contend with at the London School of Medicine and Dentistry (part of Queen Mary University of London). The exam hall doubles as a gruesome pathology showroom inside St Bartholomew's, London's oldest hospital.

The study of anatomy and pathology has changed dramatically since this Victorian museum was purpose-built in 1879. Around 5,000 diseased specimens in various shades of putrid yellow, gangrenous green and bilious orange are neatly arranged on three open-plan floors linked by a spiral staircase. Only the ground floor is open to the public, with the upper galleries reserved for teaching, cataloguing and conservation.

Carla Valentine, a sassy mortician who looks like a 1950s pin-up, worked as an autopsy assistant before landing her 'dream job' as the museum's technical curator. Prior to her appointment, the museum was in a desperate state of disrepair. The roof was leaking – and some of the potted organs were too. All the pieces downstairs are over 100 years old; those upstairs are 'fresher'. Some of Valentine's favourites include the deformed liver of a 'tight-lacer' (corset-wearer), the misshapen bandaged foot of a Chinese woman and the skull of John Bellingham, who was hanged and anatomised in 1812 after he assassinated the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval. (The surgeons were thrilled to note that Bellingham's heart continued to move for almost four hours after his death.) Prior to the Anatomy Act of 1832, there were only two ways in which medical schools could acquire cadavers: prisoners sentenced to death and dissection, or corpses purchased from body snatchers popularly known as 'resurrection men'.

The museum's limited funding doesn't stretch to a public viewing licence, so Valentine has introduced a brilliant series of talks and workshops inspired by the collection. There are taxidermy classes, lectures on funerary cannibalism and the history of syphilis, and festivals dedicated to bodily decay and broken hearts. A glass of wine and the chance to make new friends among severed hands and trepanned skulls. What's not to like?

St Bartholomew's Hospital Museum

Located in the hospital's north wing, this museum traces the evolution of medical care since Barts was founded in 1123. It contains some fine paintings, gruesome surgical tools and a tribute to Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote some of his Sherlock Holmes stories while studying medicine here. A commemorative plaque quotes Holmes' quip upon first meeting Watson in a chemistry lab at Barts: 'You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.' (Open Tues-Fri 10am-4pm.)

SKY GARDEN

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Beauty on the beast

1 Sky Garden Walk, EC3M 8AF

<https://skygarden.london>

Open: Mon-Fri 10am-6pm, weekends 11am-9pm

Admission: Free, but online booking essential. Bring ID

Transport: Monument or Bank tube



London's skyline has exploded upwards in the last ten years as property developers have sought to capitalise on the insatiable demand for housing. The City of London took the fight to Canary Wharf by building more 'signature' skyscrapers. There are always more to come – 2008 mayoral candidate Boris Johnson promised the electorate that he wouldn't allow the building of Dubai-on-Thames, but then, you know, he kind of did. In 2016 alone, there are over 430 new tall buildings planned for the capital. Some of these are welcome, but many of them simply dwarf the place.

Among the most notorious of the new showpiece builds is 20 Fenchurch Street, known as the Walkie-Talkie because of its shape. Completed in spring 2014, it promptly won the 2015 Carbuncle Cup for the worst new building in the UK. The concave glass wall at the front directs sunlight downwards, and in 2013 the construction company had to pay the owner of a car parked in the street below whose bodywork was melted by the building. The bulbous behemoth looms menacingly over Eastcheap, an ogre of a building that makes passers-by feel like ants.

However, the beast has a beautiful secret. The developers have constructed a huge light- and air-filled atrium at the top of the tower, with a balcony and a 360° view of London. Unlike the Shard, which sits directly across the river, entry is free, although the limited number of spaces means that online booking well in advance is essential. There are a couple of bars, a brasserie and a restaurant placed between two rising terraces of plants: they include figs and other flowers, shrubs and ferns that flourish all year round. The whole thing is wrapped in glass, with excellent unobstructed views (unlike the Shard). The effect is as if a minor greenhouse from Kew Gardens had been dropped on top of a skyscraper.

A church full of shoes

At the foot of 20 Fenchurch Street is St Margaret Pattens, a minor Wren church with an odd name (Pattens wasn't the saint's surname). These wooden-soled overshoes, later soled with iron rings, allowed the wealthy to walk the streets of London without muddying their shoes. The sound supposedly made the streets seem as if they were filled with horses. The church has long been associated with The Worshipful Company of Pattenmakers, and there is a display of pattens in the vestibule.

TOWER BRIDGE BASCULE CHAMBER

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Underwater engineering

Tower Bridge Road, SE1 2UP

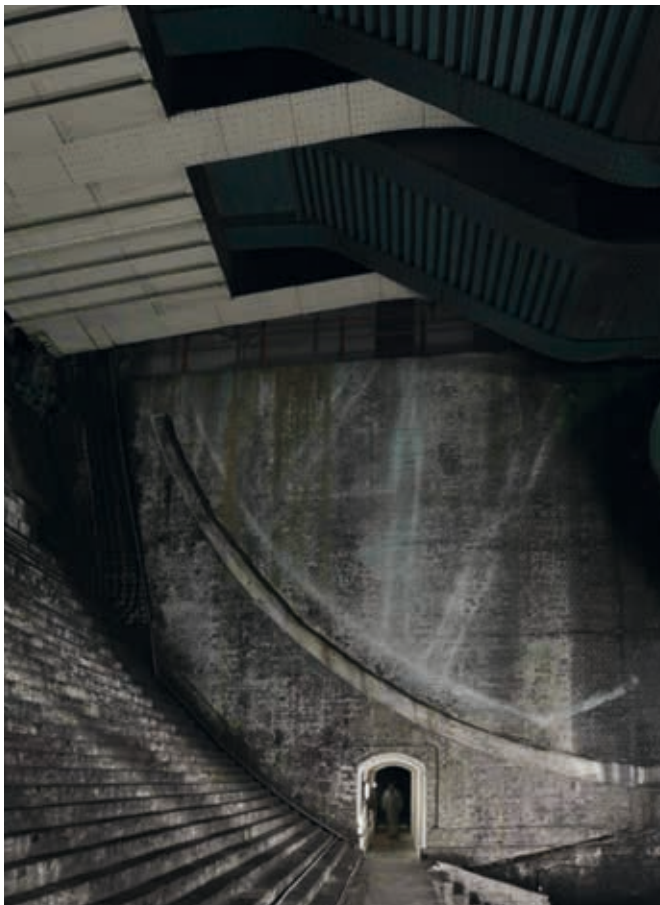
0207 403 3761

www.towerbridge.org.uk

Open: April-Sept 10am-5.30pm, Oct-March 9.30am-5pm. Check website for tour times

Admission: Check website for details

Transport: Tower Hill tube



Tower Bridge may be a preposterous structure – a colossal piece of Victorian engineering that someone has tried to disguise as a Gothic castle – but it’s undeniably an eye-catcher. The standard tour of the bridge is pretty good, especially since the installation of the thrilling/horrifying glass floors in the pedestrian walkways linking the tops of the towers. If you get your timing right, you can look straight down onto the bridge when it opens, its jaws widening below you like a giant mechanical shark. (Check the website for bridge opening times.)

But if you book a place on the Behind-the-Scenes Personal Guided Tour (that really is what it’s called!), you can delve into the bowels of this monster. Like most of its contemporaries, Tower Bridge was massively over-engineered to avoid any possibility that this most easterly of London bridges should collapse.

The high point – or in fact, the low point – of the tour is to one of the bascule chambers beneath the bridge’s twin towers. Bascule means seesaw: all 422 tons of counterbalance swing down into these giant, wedge-shaped spaces when the bridge is raised. There are hundreds of safety measures in place, but that weight still looms above your head when you stand at the bottom of the chamber staring up. Noise from the traffic overhead bounces around the space and you can hear clearly when a bus or truck rattles by. Accessed via steep, narrow stairs, most of the chamber is well below the surface of the river, on the other side of 20-foot-thick walls. Consequently, this is one of the few rat-free spaces anywhere along the Thames. There’s nothing for rodents to survive on – a bonus for muriphobes.

The acoustics in these cavernous vaults are phenomenal, and they are occasionally used for classical and contemporary concerts during the Thames Festival. However, the difficulty of getting large numbers of people in and out means that events are restricted in scale and number – check out the Festival’s website well in advance for pre-booking.

In its heyday, Tower Bridge employed an operating staff of 96; this is currently down to 12, including the six bridge ‘drivers’ who control the bascule chambers from the north-east cabin. The bridge opens around 1,000 times a year; river traffic takes priority – even the Queen has to wait.

WEST LONDON BOWLING CLUB ②

Roll up, roll up

112a Highlever Road, W10 6PL
www.westlondonbowlingclub.com
 Admission: Membership fee applies
 Transport: Latimer Road tube



I lived around the corner from this bowling green for a year before I realised it was there. Hidden at the end of a narrow alley wedged between two ordinary houses, the West London Bowling Club has been around since 1903. (It moved to the present site in 1920.)

Bordered by low-rise cottages, it was one of five 'backlands' created as communal recreation grounds for the residents of the St Quintin Estate, a leafy patch of West London that was a model of social and affordable housing long before former Prime Minister David Cameron and his ilk moved in. None of the other backlands has survived with its original use intact.

During the Second World War, while other backlands were turned into allotments, the club's members doggedly continued to bowl despite near misses by bombs and land mines. Men always wore whites. Their wives, who were not welcome on the green, had to make do with providing tea and cakes.

As one of the first female bowlers recalls: 'The year that man walked on the moon was the year that women were first allowed to walk on the green.' However, strict rules regarding the length of skirts were enforced for many years.

The popularity of bowling has waned since the club's mid-20th-century heyday. Membership dwindled, the green was unkempt and the prize-winning rose gardens became overgrown. The little clubhouse became a cheap drinking den, to the annoyance of the neighbours. Eventually the bowling club lost its licence and closed in 2013, but it has now been revived by a group of volunteers. Thanks to their efforts, the bowling club has been designated a 'local green space' that cannot be built over by developers.

Under new management, the bowling green has been relayed, a croquet lawn and petanque pitch installed, and the surrounding garden is gradually being spruced up.

The bowling season runs from mid-April to the end of September, with play from noon until one hour after sunset. Most afternoons, a few members show up for 'roll-ups' – casual games of barefoot bowls. There are occasional matches against other clubs, and experienced bowlers are usually on hand to coach beginners.

The bar is currently open on Fridays and Sundays in season, with film nights and social events year round. On a sunny summer evening, with the fragrance of freshly mowed grass and the thwack of croquet mallets hanging in the air, you could be back in the 1920s.

575 WANDSWORTH ROAD

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Dreamy DIY

575 Wandsworth Road, SW8 3JD

0207 720 9459

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/575-wandsworth-road

Open: Tours for a maximum of six people run March–Nov: Wed, Fri, Sat and Sun.

Call 0844 249 1895 or email 575wandsworthroad@nationaltrust.org.uk to book

Admission: Charges and a booking fee apply. Entry is free for National Trust members, but they still need to book a place

Transport: London Overground/rail to Wandsworth Road



First things first. If you want to visit this singular house, book well in advance – ideally, months in advance. Visitors are strictly limited to 54 a week, with tours in groups of six people at a time. Since opening its doors to the public in 2013, the house of Khadambi Asalache, bequeathed to the National Trust, has attracted more visitors than it can accommodate.

From the outside, this unassuming house doesn't look like much. When the exiled Kenyan poet, novelist and philosopher of mathematics Khadambi Asalache bought it in 1981, the small, terraced house was in a bad way. Asalache, who trained as an architect but worked at the Treasury, fixed pine floorboards to the persistent damp patches on the walls and floors. He went on to cover almost every wall, ceiling and door in the house with delicate fretwork that he hand-carved with a plasterboard knife from pine doors and floorboards scavenged from skips. This pragmatic approach to his art characterises the whole project, and the National Trust has been careful to maintain it, retaining the Polyfilla used on the ceilings and a taped-up broken windowpane in the sitting room.

Asalache carved out this private sanctuary compulsively for the rest of his life. (He only once employed a carpenter, but dismissed his work as sub-standard.) Delicate ballerinas, angels, giraffes and birds dance over every surface. The astonishing fretwork was inspired by a mixture of the Moorish art of Andalusia, carved doors in Asalache's native Lamu, panelled interiors in Damascus, and the wooden mansions along the banks of the Bosphorus in Istanbul. During conservation, over 2,000 pieces of woodwork were catalogued. The woodwork is juxtaposed with the painted decoration of the walls, doors and floors, hand-carved furniture and carefully arranged collections, including pressed-glass inkwells, postcards, and the poet's collection of pink and copper 19th-century English pottery.

The amount of stuff crammed into the house ought to be overwhelming, but the effect is quietly soothing. As the director of the Sir John Soane's Museum has said, it is 'an extremely serious and carefully worked-out exercise in *horror vacui* (fear of the void)' – and it works. In fact, 575 Wandsworth Road shares the compulsive nature of its interior with the Soane Museum. There is a huge amount to see in such a small space. The best bit? Possibly the main bedroom, with its shutters decorated with the initials of Khadambi and his partner Susie Thomson, and the kennel carved for Thomson's Tibetan spaniel next to the bed.



CROSSNESS PUMPING STATION 18

Healer of the Great Stink

*The Crossness Engines Trust, Thames Water S.T.W., Belvedere Road, SE2 9AQ
0208 311 3711*

www.crossness.org.uk

Open: Tues and Fri 9.30am-4pm and second Sunday of every month 10.30am-2pm. Check website for details of other open days

Admission: Check website for prices

Transport: Abbey Wood rail. On open days, a minibus usually operates from Abbey Wood to the Crossness site every 30 mins. Otherwise it's a brisk 30-minute walk from the station through an industrial wasteland



There aren't many opportunities to make a trip to a sewage farm, but Crossness Pumping Station – opened in 1856 by Edward, Prince of Wales – offers the chance. The obsolete Pumping Station is located in the middle of the Crossness Sewage Treatment Works, which is still very much operational: if you miss the shuttle service from the station, simply follow your nose.

The Pumping Station was part of legendary engineer Joseph Bazalgette's innovative sewage system for London. By the mid-19th century, London's exploding population meant the Thames had effectively become an open sewer. The contaminated water caused cholera outbreaks that killed over 30,000 Londoners. Plans to address this were finally put into action following the 'Great Stink' of 1858, when an unusually warm summer and clogged-up River Thames made the House of Commons unusable. Bazalgette built 1,100 miles of brick-lined, underground sewers that diverted untreated sewage downstream.

Crossness was the business end of the southern half of the system (a similar station at Beckton performs the same function for North London). Sewage arrived at the site and was pumped up into a 17-foot-deep reservoir, which could hold 27 million gallons of waste. The reservoir gates were opened twice a day, and the contents were swept out to sea on the Thames' ebb tide. Eventually, only liquid waste was disposed of in this way; the prosaically named 'sludge boats' dumped solid, untreated waste beyond the mouth of the river until 1998.

Crossness Pumping Station is an incredible place. The Beam Engine House, home to four steam-driven pumping engines, contains some of the most spectacular ornamental ironwork in the capital. At the heart of the building is the Octagon, an exuberant framework for the engines made of brightly coloured iron columns and screens. This is characteristic of the Victorians' love of Gothic adornment in the unlikeliest places.

The building was abandoned in the 1950s after it became obsolete. Ongoing restoration work, largely by unpaid volunteers, began in 1987. The scale of the engineering is unnerving: the four engines (each weirdly named after a member of the royal family) are the largest rotative beam engines in the world. They have 52-ton flywheels and 47-ton beams, and were capable of pumping around 20 milk lorries of sewage a minute into the reservoir. Only one – the 'Prince Consort' – is currently restored, but the Crossness Engines Trust is now focused on bringing 'Victoria' back to her former glory.



MUSEUM OF CURIOSITIES

(21)

The beautiful and the damned

11 Mare Street, E8 4RP

0207 998 3617

www.thelasttuesdaysociety.org

Open: Wed-Sun 12-10.30pm

Admission: Check website for prices

Transport: Cambridge Heath or London Fields rail, Bethnal Green tube

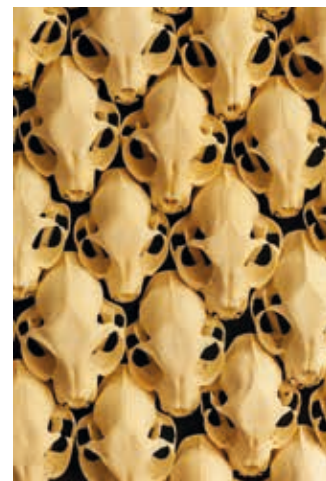


‘Those easily offended by death and decay should stay away.’ Don’t say you haven’t been warned: the Museum of Curiosities is not for the faint-hearted. (Another sign on the door, pinched from druggie dandy Sebastian Horsley’s Soho front door, reads: ‘This is not a brothel. There are no prostitutes at this address.’)

Descending a gold spiral staircase into the musty basement, it takes a while to adjust to the crepuscular gloom. Beasts, freaks and monsters gradually start swimming into view: a two-headed kitten, a unicorn’s skull, a tongue-eating louse, a mummified pygmy, pickled babies in bottles. Alongside the taxidermy and totems peering from the walls and ceilings are glass cabinets crammed with erotica (‘small pecker condoms’), juvenilia (celebrity poos) and occult paraphernalia (a sinister alchemist’s toolkit). Perhaps the weirdest item of all is ‘a casket containing some of the original darkness that Moses called down upon the earth’. There’s a corner devoted to artist Stephen Wright (see p. 366) and a shrine to Horsley, including a red glitter suit and the nails he used to crucify himself.

Most objects are labelled with spidery black captions that might have been written by Prince Charles, but are in fact the handiwork of Viktor Wynd, the collector and curator of this singular ‘Wunderkabinett’. A self-styled ‘artist, author, lecturer, impresario and ‘pataphysicist’ (the apostrophe is deliberate; the quasi-philosophy is best defined as a bunch of pretentious provocateurs), Wynd made a name for himself on the London underground scene, hosting masquerade balls and literary salons. All the while, he was amassing this private collection of the grotesque and macabre, creepy and shocking, sublime and ridiculous. It began as a curiosity shop and gallery, but achieved museum status thanks to a crowd-funding campaign. If you have anything at home you think Wynd might like, do post it to him at the museum.

The admission price includes a cup of tea at the bar upstairs, a faintly sleazy affair crammed with skeletons, skulls and stuffed animals. Absinthe cocktails, edible insects and chocolate anuses are consumed at your own risk. Occasionally, you might stumble into a taxidermy class or a seance, so it’s probably best to ring ahead of your visit.



GALA BINGO TOOTING

⑥

Chartres Cathedral meets Liberace

50 Mitcham Road, Tooting, SW17 9NA

0208 672 5717

Open: Mon-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri-Sun 10am-Midnight

Admission: Members only; membership is free to anyone over 18

Transport: Tooting Broadway tube



Now, alas, a Gala bingo hall, this was the first cinema in the UK to be listed as Grade I – the most rigorous preservation order a building can get. From the outside, the tall, square building doesn't look all that special, give or take a few columns; on the inside, it looks like Chartres Cathedral if it had been designed by Liberace. Opened in 1931, this palace to entertainment was commissioned by Sidney Bernstein, an exiled white Russian who later founded Granada TV, and designed by Fyodor Fyodorovich Kommisarzhovsky, a Russian director and set designer briefly married to actress Peggy Ashcroft.

The heavily gilded foyer is lined with Gothic mirrors and fake leaded windows, punctuated by a pair of sweeping marble staircases. But all this is relatively restrained: the auditorium – inspired by its namesake, the Alhambra Palace in Granada – is where Kommisarzhovsky went bananas. Under a coffered ceiling are cathedral porches, heraldic symbols, and glass chandeliers, now partly obscured by the bingo lighting and screens. The decoration intensifies as you approach the stage. All around the auditorium are arches filled with murals of troubadours and wimpled damsels – but underneath all this medieval madness, the bingo fans play on, eyes fixed on the cards. The combination feels like a weird early version of a themed Vegas casino deep in South London.

In its day, the Granada was the only suburban cinema in London to have its own 20-piece orchestra. The glamorous usherettes wore gold silk blouses with blue slacks, pill box hats, blue cloaks over one shoulder and white gloves, while the doormen wore a blue uniform with brass buttons, peaked caps, and gold epaulettes. On its anniversary, the cinema would serve every customer a slice of cake – wheeled in from the baker next door, it weighed over a ton. Over 2,000 people were turned away on opening night, and over three million viewers came to the pictures here every year. However, the arrival of the television sent audience numbers into a tailspin, and the cinema closed in 1973. It was revived as a bingo hall in 1991. You need to be a member to visit, though membership is free. Call the Granada for details.

Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, Little Richard, and the Rolling Stones all played to 3,000 shrieking fans at the Granada, which doubled as a music hall. The original Wurlitzer organ is still here, but its chambers are buried beneath the stage.

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