



Viewpoint

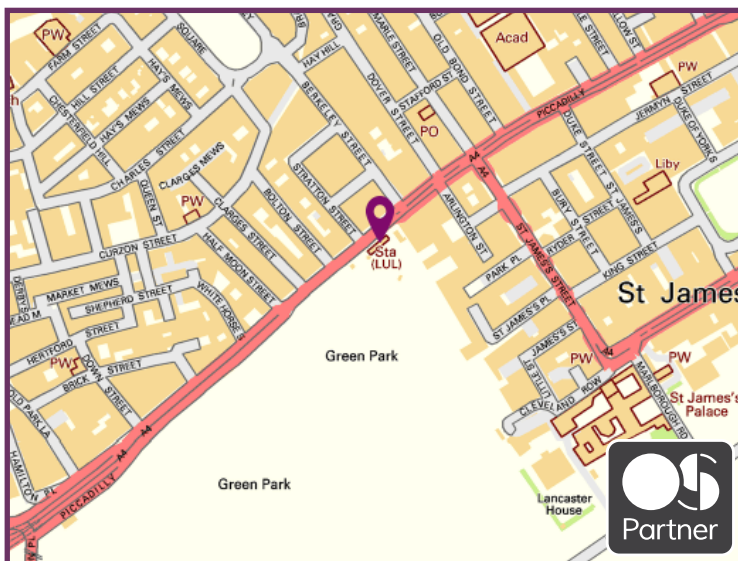
Jurassic park



Time: 15 mins

Region: Greater London

Landscape: urban



Location:

Green Park London Underground station,
City of Westminster, London W1J 9DZ

Grid reference:

TQ 28993 80269

Keep an eye out for:

Other buildings nearby with fossils in the walls

Located between Mayfair and the West End, Green Park is one of London Underground's busiest stations. Over 35 million people pass through it each year. Ignore the crowds and traffic to take a good look at the walls.

Spanning the centre is a decorative frieze of sea creatures. The bricks above and below are covered in strange marks, cuts and holes - including some that look like shells.

Why does this Tube station have dead sea creatures all over it?



The answer lies in what the building is made of – Portland stone, a type of limestone from the island of Portland in Dorset. Portland stone dates from the Jurassic Period of around 150 million years ago. The shells in the walls here are fossils.

Most limestone, including Portland stone, was created by a chemical reaction in warm water. In the Jurassic Period the land that made up Britain was under a warm shallow sea. As sea water heated, carbon dioxide gas was released into the atmosphere.

This allowed a sticky substance called calcium carbonate to build up on the sea bed, like scale in a kettle. Sand and dead sea creatures were slowly covered in billions of the sticky particles, which gradually cemented together in layers to form limestone.

Dorset fossils have ended up here because Portland stone is a popular building material in London. The stone is very strong and resists weathering. First quarried by the Romans, Portland stone was shipped to London from the 14th century. It became very fashionable after the Great Fire of 1666, when Christopher Wren used nearly a million cubic feet of it to rebuild St Paul's Cathedral.

Most Portland stone used for building is carefully finished so that blemishes (including fossils) don't show. The station by contrast, offers a reminder of London's development; the 'modern' stone city was built from prehistoric sea creatures.

Park Life

Just behind the station look in the park for a large round air duct, also made in Portland stone. Many of the fossil holes have filled with greenery. Sea shells from 150 million years ago have provided a home for new life.

Paved with gold, lined with lime

Many London landmarks feature Portland stone including; the British Museum, Bank of England, National Gallery, the Cenotaph, BBC Broadcasting House and nearby Buckingham Palace. It is also used in countless private buildings. Why not see how many you can find?



Viewpoint created by Rory Walsh

Photos: Detail of Green Park station / Portland stone by Portland Bill lighthouse, Dorset / Similar fossils at BBC Broadcasting House © Rory Walsh