

Albertopolis

A self guided walk around South Kensington



Explore London's quarter for the arts and sciences
Discover why it was created and how it has developed
See some of the capital's most iconic buildings
Uncover remarkable stories of artists, inventors, explorers and spies

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the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks







Contents

Introduction	4
Route overview	5
Practical information	6
Detailed route maps	8
Commentary	10
Further information	37
Credits	38

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Cover image: Detail of the Royal Albert Hall © Rory Walsh

Albertopolis

Explore London's quarter for science, technology, culture and the arts

Over 150 years ago the place now called South Kensington was a series of open fields and market gardens. That was until two men had a vision for creating a part of London dedicated to science, education and the arts.

Fondly known as 'Albertopolis' after its royal patron, the area was designed to celebrate the achievements and grandeur of Victorian Britain.



An aerial view of Albertopolis (June 2011)
© Andreas Praefcke, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Albertopolis is still thriving today as the home of many of London's world-class museums, cultural institutes and scientific organisations. It also includes dozens of embassies, hosts hundreds of international students and welcomes thousands of visitors from around the world.



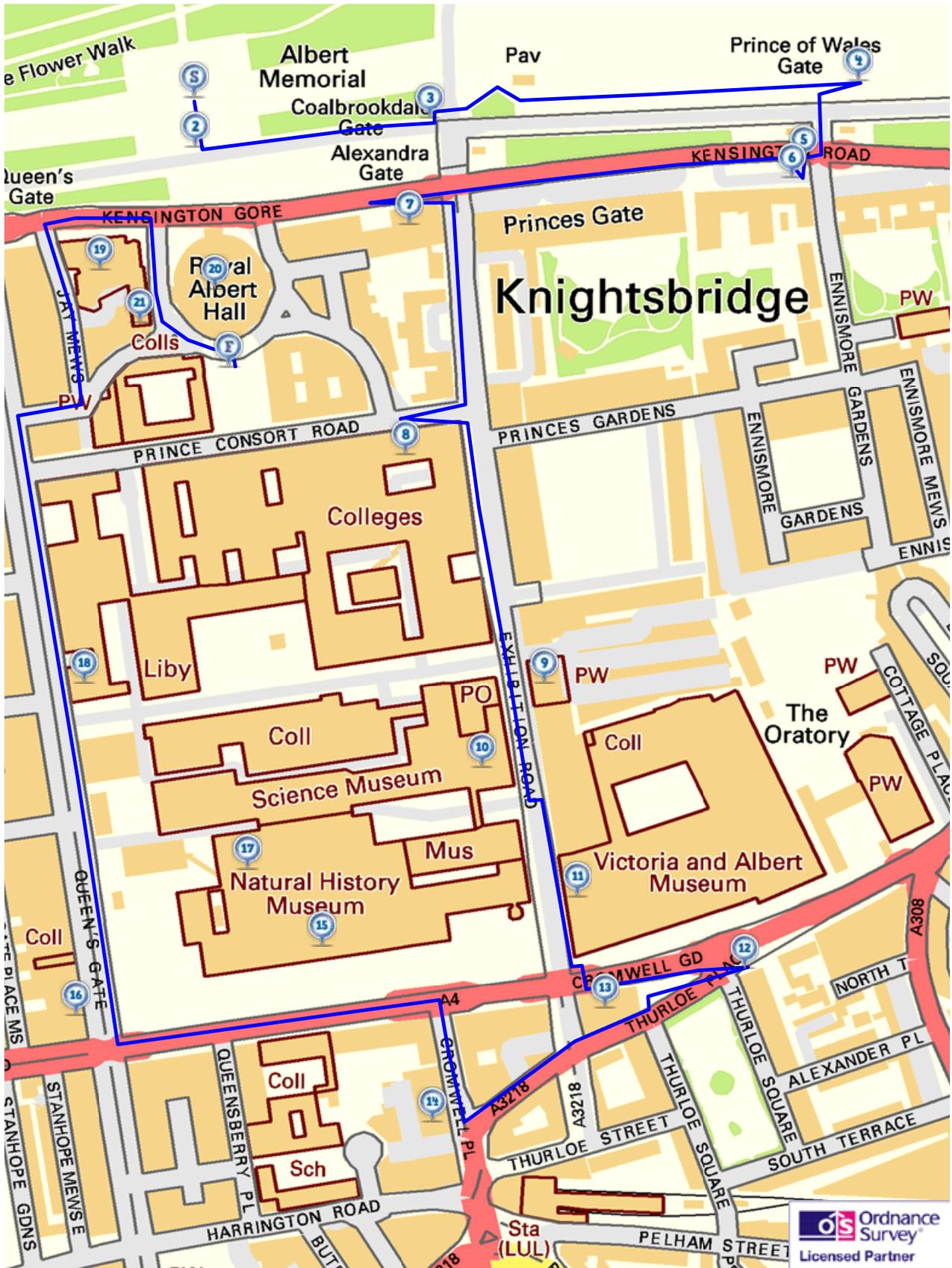
The Albert Memorial at sunset
© Rory Walsh

Explore London's quarter for the arts and sciences on foot and find out how it was created.

Discover more about the great institutions established there. See some of the capital's most magnificent buildings.

Along the way, hear some remarkable stories about diplomats and spies, musicians and artists, explorers and inventors.

Route overview



Practical information

Location	South Kensington, Central London
Getting there	<p>Train - Nearest mainline stations are London Paddington and London Victoria</p> <p>Underground - Nearest stations are South Kensington, High Street Kensington and Lancaster Gate</p> <p>Bus - Routes 9, 10, 52, 70, 360 and 452 stop near the Royal Albert Hall and Albert Memorial</p> <p>Bicycle - Several Barclays Cycle Hire docking stations in the area including both ends of Exhibition Road</p>
Start point	Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens, SW7 2AP
Directions to the walk start	<p>From South Kensington Underground station - Take the pedestrian tunnel from inside the ticket hall. At the end go up the steps and turn left onto Exhibition Road. At the top of the road turn left. Use the pedestrian crossing outside the Royal Albert Hall to cross to the Memorial.</p> <p>From High Street Kensington Underground station - Turn right onto Kensington High Street. Find a safe place to cross over and continue along the left hand side. The Memorial is a ½ mile on the left opposite the Royal Albert Hall.</p> <p>From Lancaster Gate Underground station - Cross the main road and go through the gates into Hyde Park / Kensington Gardens. At the main junction of paths bear diagonally right along the path up to a large sculpture. Continue along the widest path up to the Memorial.</p>
Finish point	Royal Albert Hall, SW7 2AP
Distance	2 miles
Level	Gentle - A fairly level route

Terrain

The whole route is on pavements or paved footpaths. Be careful of traffic when crossing busy roads. The route can be very busy especially during weekends, school holidays and tourist seasons.

Suitable for

Families – A busy but safe area. Lots of family-friendly attractions along the route.

Wheelchairs / pushchairs – An entirely step-free route. Please note though that South Kensington Underground station has no lift; there are several flights of steps to street level.

Refreshments

Many places to eat and drink on and near the walk route including cafés in the park and museums.

Toilets

Free public toilets in the museums, many with baby changing facilities. Also toilets in Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park (charges apply).

Places to visit

The museums on the route are free to enter (apart from special exhibitions). Visit their individual websites for opening hours and exhibition details:

Natural History Museum - www.nhm.ac.uk

Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum - www.pism.co.uk

Science Museum - www.sciencemuseum.org.uk

Victoria & Albert Museum - www.vam.ac.uk

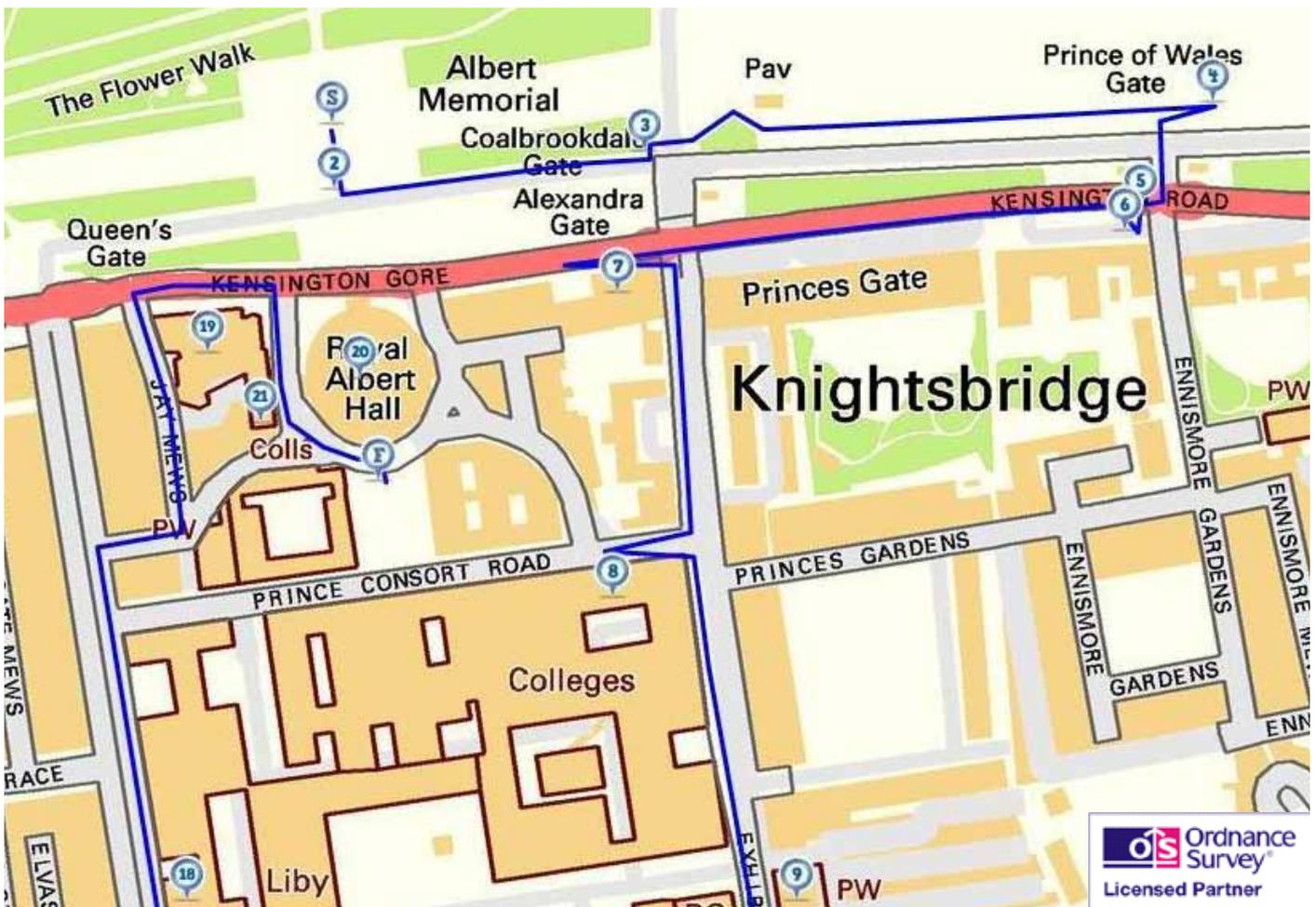
Guided tours of the **Albert Memorial** take place on the first Sunday of each month between June and December. Fee £6, meet at the memorial at 2pm or 3pm.

The Serpentine Gallery and **Serpentine Sackler Gallery**, both in Kensington Gardens, are open Tuesdays to Sundays, 10am to 6pm. Free entry. www.serpentinegallery.org

Tourist information

Many of the museums and attractions have their own Visitor Information points. The nearest Tourist Information office is at Victoria station, opposite Platform 8. Open 7 days a week.

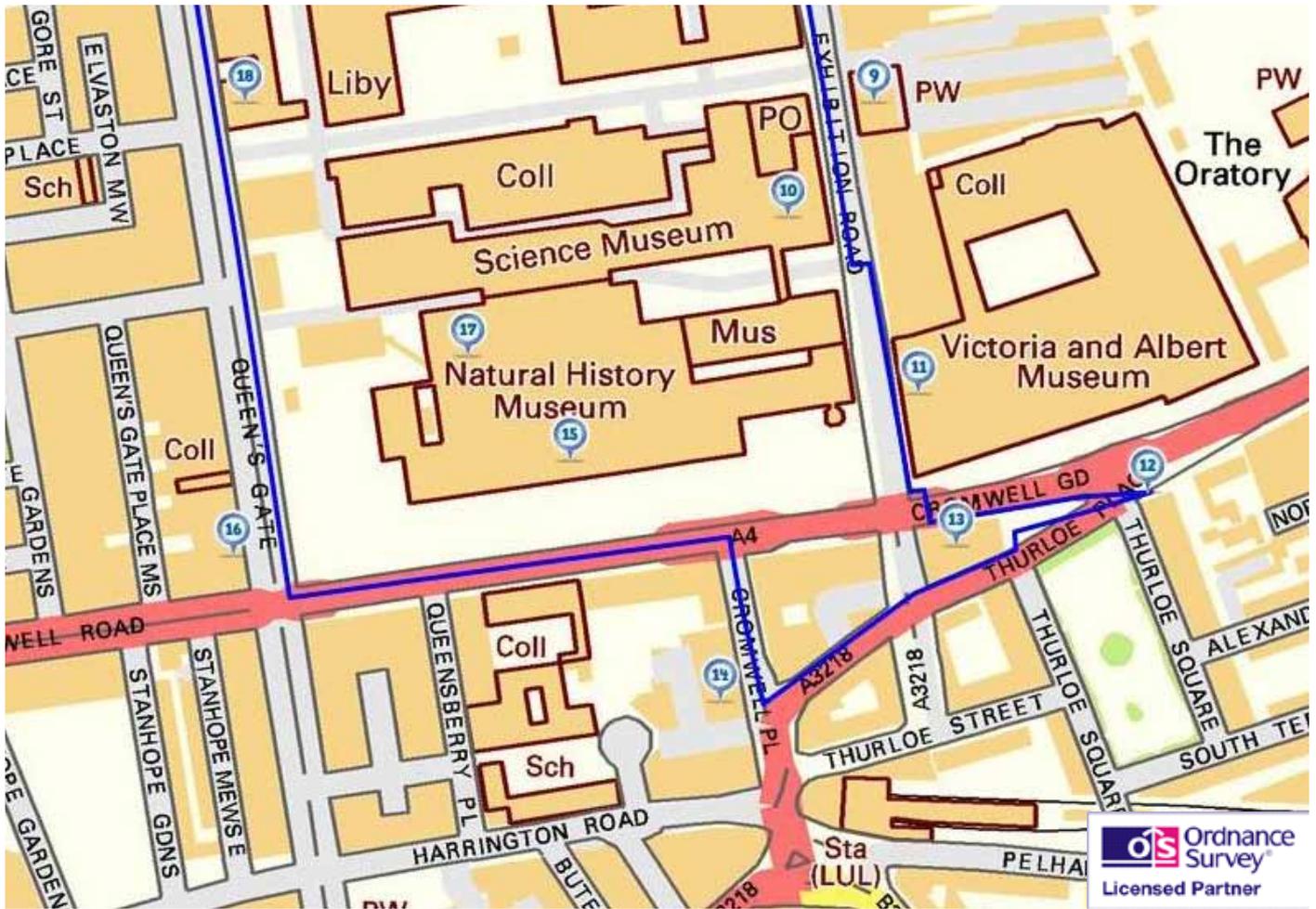
Detail of the start and end of the route



Stopping points

- S.** Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens
- 2.** Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens
- 3.** Coalbrookdale Gate, Kensington Gardens
- 4.** Great Exhibition information board, Hyde Park
- 5.** Princes Gate
- 6.** 14 Princes Gate
- 7.** Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore
- 8.** Royal School of Mines, Prince Consort Road
- ...
- 19.** Darwin Building, Royal College of Art
- 20.** Royal Albert Hall
- 21.** Former Royal College of Organists and the Royal College of Music
- F.** Great Exhibition memorial beside Royal Albert Hall

Detail of the middle section of the route



Stopping points

- 9. Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, Exhibition Road
- 10. Science Museum, Exhibiton Road
- 11. Henry Cole Wing, V&A Museum, Exhibition Road
- 12. 33 Thurloe Place
- 13. Aga Khan Ismaili Institute
- 14. View of the Institut Francais, Cromwell Place
- 15. Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road
- 16. Baden-Powell House, 65-67 Queen's Gate
- 17. Darwin Centre, Natural History Museum, Queen's Gate
- 18. 170 Queen's Gate

1. Welcome to Albertopolis

Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens

Welcome to South Kensington. This part of London contains some of Britain's most famous landmarks and visitor attractions, including the Royal Albert Hall, Victoria & Albert Museum, Science Museum and Natural History Museum. This area is also known as 'Albertopolis' - a name you might not have heard before.

In 1851, London hosted the Great Exhibition in nearby Hyde Park. This was a world fair showcasing different industries with a particular emphasis on science, technology and the arts. It was a huge success. It also made a substantial profit, which was used to buy 86 acres of land. This land was laid out to become the home of some of Britain's greatest educational and cultural institutions.



The Albert Memorial
© Mike Jackson



The Darwin Centre cocoon, Natural History Museum
© Nicolas de Camaret, Flickr (CCL)

This walk explores how Albertopolis has grown and developed. We will soon find out the origins of its curious nickname plus get a flavour of this cultural quarter's grandeur. As we visit its magnificent buildings and great institutions we will see how the area has evolved.

We will also find out how a place created over 150 years ago still attracts millions of visitors by keeping up at the cutting edge of the arts and sciences in the twenty-first century.

Directions 1

Face the gold statue at the centre of the Albert Memorial.

2. A man with a vision

Albert Memorial, Kensington Gardens

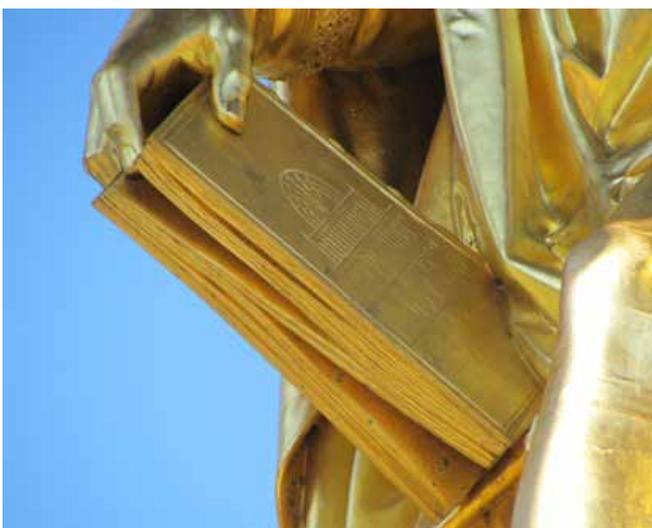
This magnificent memorial commemorates the man who had the vision for developing a cultural quarter of London. The Albert Memorial is dedicated to Prince Albert who was born in 1819 in Saxony, Germany. His family was connected to many of Europe's ruling monarchs and at the age of 20 he married his first cousin, Queen Victoria. Together they had nine children.

As Prince Consort, Albert had no official power or duties. But he got involved in many public causes, including educational reform and the abolition of slavery. He also became President of the RSA – or the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

Through his connections at the RSA he became involved in the Great Exhibition of 1851. The success of the Exhibition gave him the idea to create a part of London permanently dedicated to the arts and sciences; hence this area's nickname - Albertopolis.



Portrait of Prince Albert (1842)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



Prince Albert's Great Exhibition catalogue
© Rory Walsh

Ten years afterwards Prince Albert died aged just 42. Queen Victoria went into deep mourning for the rest of her life. She commissioned this enormous memorial to him. It was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott and took over 10 years to complete.

Take your time to have a good look around the memorial. It is full of details that celebrate Prince Albert's role as a patron of the arts and sciences. The centrepiece is a seated statue of the Prince looking towards the Royal Albert Hall. Can you see what Albert is holding in his hand? It is a catalogue of The Great Exhibition - which we will find out more about shortly.

Immediately below Albert is 'The Frieze of Parnassus'. This features 169 figures of famous composers, architects, poets, painters and sculptors. Look at the other sculptures too. The inner group depicts Victorian industries – agriculture, commerce, engineering and manufacturing. The outer group represents each of the four corners of the British Empire – a camel for Africa, a buffalo for the Americas, an elephant for Asia, and a bull for Europe.



Details from the Albert Memorial including part of the 'Frieze of Parnassus' (bottom right)
© Rory Walsh

Directions 2

Face Prince Albert's statue and turn right along the wide avenue. Stop beside the large metal gates. Take care as cyclists use this gate to access Kensington Gardens.

3. The gates to Albertopolis

Coalbrookdale Gate, Kensington Gardens

Today these large iron gates mark the boundary between Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park. They are also another type of memorial.

Look carefully at the bottom of the main pillars for a set of small plaques. They tell us that these gates were made by the Coalbrookdale Company for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

'The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations' was staged to display the wonders of industry and manufacturing. The exhibits were from around the world but there was a particular emphasis on Britain's role as an industrial power.

For example, the Coalbrookdale Company that made these gates also made the world's first cast-iron bridge. It still stands over the River Severn in Shropshire.

As the idea for Exhibition took shape, Queen Victoria established a Royal Commission for it with Prince Albert as President. The Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 still exists today as a grant-making educational trust.



Coalbrookdale Gate
© Rory Walsh

These gates are another survivor from the Exhibition. They stood at the exhibition entrance - we will see the original site at the next stop.

Directions 3

Go through the gates using the gateway to the left. Look out for cyclists turning on the pathway. Cross over the road at the traffic lights. Take care here as this junction can be very busy. Go through the gap to the café then follow the path with trees on your left and the horse track and road on your right. Continue for about 200 metres until you find an information board and a round plaque in the ground.

4. An exhibition of all nations

Great Exhibition information board, Hyde Park



The Great Exhibition building
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

We have now arrived at the home of the Great Exhibition. The flat grassy area now used for sports pitches was where the exhibition building stood. Between May and October of 1851 the wonders of industry were displayed here on a 26-acre plot.

The building was designed by Sir Joseph Paxton, a horticulturist who built glass houses. Made from a cast-iron frame and large pieces of glass, it was essentially a giant greenhouse. Punch magazine mockingly called it 'the Crystal Palace'. This name stuck: when the Great Exhibition closed, the building was dismantled and rebuilt on Sydenham Hill in south east London. That area has been known as Crystal Palace ever since.

'The Crystal Palace' was over 560 metres long and 125 metres wide. We can get a feel for its size by looking across this area of grass. Also look at the diagram on the information board. It must have been an awe-inspiring sight. The writer Charlotte Brontë visited and recorded it as "vast, strange, new and impossible to describe".

If the outside was spectacular, the inside was just as incredible. There were almost 14,000 exhibitors and over 100,000 exhibits from 50 different nations and 39 colonies or protectorates. It was a celebration of science, technology, invention and creativity. Exhibits ranged from steam engines to glittering diamonds, from a newly-invented voting machine to a barometer that used leeches!

Charlotte Brontë again: “Its grandeur does not consist in one thing, but in the unique assemblage of all things. Whatever human industry has created you find there [...] It seems as if only magic could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the earth – as if none but supernatural hands could have arranged it thus, with such a blaze and contrast of colours and marvellous power of effect.”

Over its six-month duration the exhibition had an incredible six million visitors. Entrance cost five shillings for the first three weeks and one shilling thereafter.



Queen Victoria opens the Great Exhibition
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)



Inside the Great Exhibition building
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The organising committee made a substantial profit. This surplus was used to buy 86 acres of land to the south of Hyde Park. Centred on the appropriately named Exhibition Road, this land was developed for educational and cultural institutions.

The original ‘Crystal Palace’ has not survived. In November 1936 it caught fire during the night. The flames could be seen for many miles across London and the building was destroyed. Visitors to the site can still see the foundations and steps. There’s also an excellent little museum that is well worth a visit.

Directions 4

Retrace your steps a short way to the bollards by the kerb. Cross the horse ride then South Carriage Drive and leave the park through the gate. Cross Kensington Road here at the traffic lights and turn right. Walk past Kingston House North and stop at the beginning of a terrace of white houses.

5. Upmarket housing

Princes Gate

This splendid terrace of white townhouses is Princes Gate. Originally there were two terraces either side of a fine mansion called Kingston House. The mansion and the eastern terrace have long since been demolished.

The remaining terrace was designed by Harvey Lonsdale Elmes. He is most famous for designing the magnificent St George's Hall in Liverpool. By the time building began on Princes Gate in 1846, Elmes was in poor health. Sadly he died of tuberculosis before these houses or St George's Hall were completed.



Princes Gate
© Rory Walsh

While Elmes was the designer, the builders were John Elger and John Kelk who went on to build the Albert Memorial that we saw earlier. The houses were completed two years before the Great Exhibition took place across the road. When the Crystal Palace arrived, however, many prospective tenants were put off - it blocked the view of the park and brought noise and disruption. Only five tenants moved in and the terrace wasn't full until after the Crystal Palace had been dismantled.

So who originally lived here? Residents included George Baker, a timber merchant; Henry William Eaton, a china-silk broker; Major-General James Caulfield, a director of the East India Company; and Edward Ladd Betts, a railway contractor.

Other notable residents were Sir Robert Peel, Member of Parliament and son of the Prime Minister; John Gellibrand Hubbard, Governor of the Bank of England and politician; and Edward Wyndham Harrington Schenley, a former soldier and commissioner for the suppression of the slave trade. We will find out about some later famous residents in a moment.

Directions 5

Go up to the first house, Number 14.

6. Art and ambassadors

14 Princes Gate

Although the fine buildings of Princes Gate were designed as private homes many became offices for cultural and diplomatic organisations. Look along the terrace and you can see various flags. These are all embassies. There are many more around Albertopolis. See how many you can spot throughout the walk.

Meanwhile number 20 Princes Gate houses the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum. It is named after Wladyslaw Sikorski, who was Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile during the Second World War.



A Native American head on 14 Princes Gate
© Rory Walsh

One of the most interesting buildings in the terrace is Number 14. This is a particularly good example of a building that has had various owners. Until the end of 2014 it was occupied by the Royal College of General Practitioners. It is now being redeveloped as a private house.

Before construction work began, we would have seen a set of Native American heads above the windows and two blue plaques on the wall.

The story starts when the American banker, Junius Spencer Morgan, acquired Number 13 in 1858. When he died, Junius left the property to his son J Pierpont Morgan. For tax reasons, JP Morgan kept his large art collection here. As the collection grew, he bought the freehold of Number 14 next door and joined the two buildings. After he died in 1913 the house passed to his son, JP Morgan Junior, who eventually offered it to the American Government.

The American Government refurbished the building, remodelled the front and added the distinctive heads. In the late 1930s John F Kennedy stayed here as a young boy when his father was US Ambassador to Britain. After 1955 the building housed the Independent Television Authority before the Royal College of General Practitioners acquired it in 1962.

Directions 6

Continue along the terrace of Princes Gate and pass the embassies. Look across the top of Exhibition Road to the building on the corner with with two large statues on the walls. Cross over at the traffic lights - take care again as the junction can be very busy - and pass this building on the left. Stop when you reach a set of railings outside a building set back from the road.

7. Age of exploration

Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore

This is Lowther Lodge, probably one of London's finest examples of nineteenth-century domestic architecture. It is built in 'Queen Anne' style with characteristic red brick, towering chimneys and a sunflower motif.

It is named after the diplomat and MP William Lowther, who bought the site in 1870. Lowther commissioned the most outstanding domestic architect of the day – Norman Shaw – to build a 'country house' on the edge of town. Imagine living in such a grand house overlooking Hyde Park!

Since 1913, the building has been home to the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers). The Society traces its roots back to 1830, when the Geographical Society of London was founded as an institution to promote the advancement of geographical science.

Today the Royal Geographical Society is a leading learned society that promotes research, education, fieldwork and expeditions. The Society tries to bring geography alive through a wide range of innovative programmes – including Discovering Britain, which this walk is a part of.



Lowther Lodge in its first incarnation as a private house, including a grand downstairs salon (1882)
© RGS-IBG

Directions 7a

Retrace your steps back towards the traffic lights at the junction with Exhibition Road. Look up at the two large statues on the walls of the Royal Geographical Society. You can see David Livingstone on Kensington Gore and Ernest Shackleton around the corner.



Statues of David Livingstone (left) and Ernest Shackleton (right) at Hot and Cold Corner
© Rory Walsh

In its early years the Royal Geographical Society was closely associated with exploration. The Society sponsored many famous explorers. Large statues of two of them look out from the lecture theatre added to Lowther Lodge in 1929.

David Livingstone was a missionary who explored and mapped much of Africa. Livingstone is perhaps most famous for going missing. Deep in Africa, he lost contact with the outside world for six years. In 1871 a newspaper sent journalist Henry Morton Stanley to find Livingstone as a publicity stunt. Against the odds, Stanley succeeded. He tracked Livingstone down in Tanzania, greeting him with the now famous question “Doctor Livingstone, I presume?”

Around the corner on Exhibition Road is Ernest Shackleton, an Antarctic explorer. Between 1901 and 1909, he travelled on three expeditions to the South Pole. The third saw Shackleton set a record for travelling the closest anybody had got to the Pole - 112 miles. Shackleton later attempted to cross the Antarctic continent. During the journey his ship, the *Endurance*, became trapped in ice for two months. In a dramatic fight for survival, Shackleton left Antarctica by rowing a lifeboat almost 800 miles across the southern Atlantic Ocean.

Because of these two statues and the places the men explored – tropical Africa and the South Pole – the junction between Kensington Gore and Exhibition Road has a unique name. It is known to all London black cab drivers as ‘Hot and Cold Corner’.

Directions 7b

If you haven't already, make your way to the Shackleton statue. Then continue along Exhibition Road past the modern entrance of the RGS. Take the first right into Prince Consort Road. Continue up to a side road on the right. Look across Prince Consort Road at the grand white building opposite with two statues outside.

8. Mining gold and diamonds

Royal School of Mines, Prince Consort Road

This is the grand entrance to the Royal School of Mines, which is now part of Imperial College. Imperial College occupies a substantial part of Albertopolis and we will visit more of their buildings later in the walk.

In 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, the government founded its first ever technical higher education establishment – the Museum of Practical Geology. This later merged with the Royal College of Chemistry and became the Royal School of Mines. Their grand building was constructed between 1910 and 1913. It was designed by Sir Aston Webb who created many of the buildings in Albertopolis.



Detail from the Royal School of Mines entrance
© Rory Walsh



Imperial College Business School
© Rory Walsh

Notice the memorial busts either side of the doorway. These are two School benefactors. Alfred Beit was a gold and diamond magnate. During his lifetime he made generous donations for scientific work and education. In his will he bequeathed a large sum of money for infrastructure development and university education. The other memorial is to Julius Wernher, who also made money from South African gold and diamonds. He was a passionate art collector, and was made a Baron in 1905. When he died he was one of the richest men in Britain.

On the way to the next stop we will pass Imperial College's newest building. The distinctive glass-fronted Business School was completed in 2009. As we pass it look for a statue inside of Queen Victoria.

Directions 8

Retrace your steps to then turn right to cross over the end of Prince Consort Road. Continue on Exhibition Road past the glass entrance to Imperial College Business School. Stop at the junction with Imperial College Road, opposite a modern church.

9. Newer developments

Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints

On the opposite side of Exhibition Road, notice the contrast between the modern church and the older townhouses. The building styles are quite different but the cultural institutions continue.

The terrace is another part of Princes Gate. The Austrian Trade Commission is at Number 45, the Goethe-Institut (the German cultural institute) is at Number 50, and Number 55 is the Polish Hearth Club.

The church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That's the official name of the religious denomination commonly known as the Mormons, established in 1830 by Joseph Smith with its headquarters in Salt Lake City.



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints spire
© Rory Walsh



Part of the redesigned paving in Exhibition Road
© Rory Walsh

This church is one of the newer additions to Albertopolis. It was built in 1961 on a plot of land that had remained empty since being bombed in the Second World War. It was designed by Sir Thomas Bennett, who also developed the new towns of Crawley and Stevenage.

An even newer addition to this area is the road itself. From 2010, Exhibition Road was redesigned to give greater priority to pedestrians. This was much needed, as the area attracts over 11 million visitors each year and gets very busy. One local politician claimed that the new design would transform the street into "the most beautiful in London". What do you think of the layout?

Directions 9

Continue a short way along Exhibition Road. Pass the tunnel for the Underground station and stop near the entrance to the Science Museum.

10. Keeping up to date

Science Museum, Exhibition Road

When the Great Exhibition was over, many of the exhibits needed a new home. They included examples of industrial and decorative art and a few miscellaneous science collections.

In 1857 the South Kensington Museum was built just across the road. The building was clad in sheets of corrugated iron. This ugly structure was soon known as the 'Brompton Boilers'. In 1899 Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone for a range of buildings to replace them. She decreed the site be renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Science Museum
© Rory Walsh

During this period the science and art collections were both expanding. It was decided that they should be displayed in separate buildings. So in 1913 work began on the Science Museum.



Children exploring Science Museum exhibits
© Nevit Dilmen, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The Science Museum's original collection included the Great Exhibition displays of Animal Products, Food, Educational Apparatus and Building Materials. There were also examples of machinery from the patent office and a collection of ship models.

The Science Museum still has these exhibits but it has grown and kept up to date with developments in science, technology, industry and medicine. The exhibition galleries are regularly changed to illustrate and explain science to visitors. Around 2.7 million people visit the Science Museum every year to see a collection of over 300,000 objects.

Directions 10

From the Science Museum, continue a short distance further then look across Exhibition Road at the ornate red brick and yellow stone building.

11. An unrivalled collection

Henry Cole Wing, Victoria and Albert Museum

Across the road is the Henry Cole Wing of the Victoria and Albert Museum, known as the V&A. As we've already discovered, it was established by Queen Victoria to house art collections. It is now the world's largest museum of decorative arts and design. It has a permanent collection of over 4.5 million objects in 145 galleries.

The collection comes from all over the world and includes ceramics, glass, silver, ironwork, jewellery, clothes, textiles, furniture, sculpture, prints, drawings, musical instruments and photographs. Some of these objects are 5,000 years old.



The elaborate Henry Cole Wing, V&A Museum
© Rory Walsh



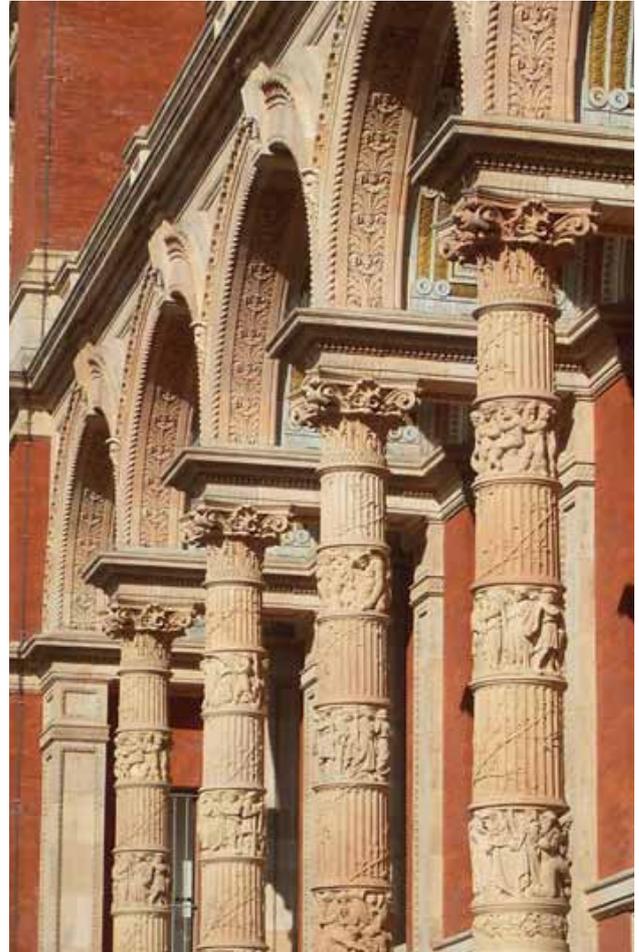
Victory statue on the top of the V&A
© Rory Walsh

The Henry Cole Wing is a beautiful and monumental structure. It was first occupied by the School of Naval Architects, then by the Science School, and then by Imperial College. It is another excellent example of how buildings in Albertopolis have had different uses.

To the right of the Henry Cole Wing is another one, the museum's Exhibition Road Quarter. This grand courtyard opened in June 2017 and allows people to enter the museum from Exhibition Road. Underneath it are large underground gallery spaces.

Notice that visitors pass through a row of very tall columned gates. This is the Aston Webb Screen, designed by Sir Aston Webb the architect of the Royal School of Mines that we saw earlier. Today it welcomes people inside but it was originally built in 1909 to hide the museum's ugly Victorian boilers!

Look carefully and you might notice that parts of the Screen are less than perfect – there are various holes and pockmarks in the stone. These were caused during the Second World War when a double bomb exploded in Exhibition Road. All the windows of the V&A were knocked out and the museum lost most of its roof, leaving exhibits exposed to the elements for several days. Opposite the V&A, The Geological Survey Museum (which is now part of the Natural History Museum) also shows similar signs of shrapnel damage.



Details from the Henry Cole Wing, and Aston Webb Screen, including bomb damage and inscription (bottom left)
© Mike Jackson / Rory Walsh

Directions 11

Cross over Exhibition Road to have a closer look at the bomb damage on the V&A. Continue along the left hand side of Exhibition Road to the junction with Cromwell Road. Cross at the pedestrian crossing and turn left until you are opposite the entrance to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Stop outside the white building, Number 33 Thurloe Square.

12. King Cole and Christmas cards

33 Thurloe Square

At the beginning of the walk we met Prince Albert, who was a driving force behind the Great Exhibition and its long-term legacy. The other key character was Sir Henry Cole who lived here at 33 Thurloe Square.

Sir Henry Cole was a civil servant and a member of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (or the RSA in short). There he met Prince Albert, the RSA's President. With Albert's encouragement Cole organised a successful Exhibition of Art Manufactures in 1847 with larger exhibitions in the following two years.



A copy of the world's first commercially produced Christmas card, made by Sir Henry Cole in 1843 - Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Cole also visited the Paris Exhibition of 1849. He felt that it lacked an international dimension so he secured Prince Albert's backing to adapt the next RSA exhibitions into one larger international event. This paved the way for the Great Exhibition of 1851 we have already heard so much about.

Sir Henry Cole is credited with made the Exhibition a financial success. It was Cole who suggested the entrance fees and our route down Exhibition Road has passed many of the institutions established as a result.

Cole was also appointed the first General Superintendent of the Department of Practical Art, a government body set up to improve standards of art and design education. In this capacity Cole was instrumental in developing the Victoria & Albert Museum. He became the V&A's first Director.

Often described in newspapers as 'Old King Cole', he is also devised the concept of sending greetings cards at Christmas time. In 1843 he introduced the world's first commercial Christmas card. In 2001 a card he sent to his grandmother sold at auction for £22,500!

Directions 12

With your back to 33 Thurloe Square, turn left. Cross Thurloe Place using the traffic island and go through the triangular garden. When you reach the sculpture bear left into Thurloe Place. At the traffic lights, turn right. Stop outside the grey building next to the Underground station tunnel entrance.

13. A blend of eastern and western styles

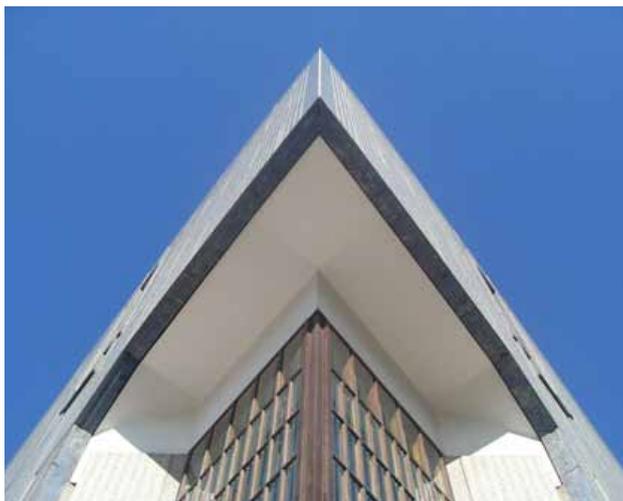
Aga Khan Ismaili Institute

Like the Mormon Church that we saw earlier this is another religious building and another twentieth-century addition to Albertopolis. This is the Aga Khan Ismaili Institute, better known as the Ismaili Centre.

Ismaili is the second largest branch within Shia Islam. The largest Ismaili communities are in Iran and Pakistan, with worshippers throughout South Asia and the Middle East. However, smaller communities of Ismailis are found worldwide. For the Ismaili community living in London, this building serves as a religious, cultural and social centre.



The Ismaili Centre
© Mike Jackson



Detail of the Ismaili Centre
© Rory Walsh

The building was opened in 1985 by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the presence of Mawlana Hazar Imam - the Aga Khan Ismaili spiritual leader - and government ministers, members of Parliament, diplomats and leaders of the Ismaili community.

The exterior was designed by British architect Neville Conder and the Islamic interior was designed by Karl Schlaminger, a German-born Muslim. The design brings together traditional Islamic style with modern Western influences and uses materials and colours compatible with the surrounding buildings which are more than a century older. There is also a beautiful roof garden which is a spot of tranquillity above the busy road.

Directions 13

From the Ismaili Centre, keep the traffic lights on your left and carefully cross over the end of Exhibition Road. Continue along Thurloe Place. Note the various cafés, restaurants and shops. When you reach Cromwell Place you should see the Institut Français directly opposite.

14. Little France

Institut Français, Cromwell Place

We are now in the heart of an area known as Petite France or 'Little France'. Cromwell Place is home to the French Embassy and the building ahead of us, the Institut Français.

The Institut is the French government's official centre of language and culture in the UK. It comprises a cinema, multi-media library, language centre and French bistro. It also runs a programme of talks and films promoting French language and culture and to encourage cross-cultural exchange.

Also in this block is the Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle, usually referred to as 'The Lycée'. It is named after the famous French statesman who took refuge there while in exile from Nazi-occupied France during the Second World War.

The school now has 3,500 pupils between the ages of 3 and 18 and teaches predominantly in French. It is one of the most academically-successful French schools outside of France. There are about two million French people living outside France, with around 113,000 of them in the UK. The French community in South Kensington is one of the largest.



Scenes from Petite France
© Rory Walsh

In the surrounding streets look out for Parisian-style restaurants and pavement cafés, baguette shops, bars and bookshops. Feel free to explore this area a little and perhaps have some refreshments before continuing with the walk.

Directions 14

When you are ready, follow Cromwell Place with the Institut Français on your left. Cross over Cromwell Road at the traffic lights and turn left along the pavement by the railings. Stop when you are opposite the main entrance of the Natural History Museum.

15. 70 million specimens

Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road

After the successful Great Exhibition this site by Cromwell Road was earmarked for similar events. In fact, it was used for the International Exhibition of 1862. This was deemed a success but the building it was housed in was not. So two years later it was demolished.

The site eventually made way for the Natural History Museum that we can see today. The Museum's origins go back more than 250 years to 1753 when physician and collector of natural curiosities, Sir Hans Sloane, left his extensive collection to the nation.



The Natural History Museum
© David Iliff via Wikimedia Commons (License: CC-BY-SA 3.0)

Sloane's specimens originally formed part of the British Museum. Other collections were added, including specimens from Captain James Cook's first voyage to Australia and New Zealand from 1769 to 1771 aboard HMS Endeavour. As the number of specimens grew, a new home was needed for the nation's natural history collection. The Natural History Museum opened its doors to the public on Easter Monday 1881.

Arguably one of the most beautiful Victorian buildings in London, it was designed by Alfred Waterhouse, a young architect from Liverpool. It is one of Britain's most striking examples of Romanesque architecture. Look carefully and we can see the museum is decorated with an astonishing series of sculptures of plants and animals. Extinct species are placed to the east and the living to the west.

The museum is now home to a staggering 70 million life and earth science specimens. There are items from all over the world divided into five main categories – Botany, Entomology, Mineralogy, Palaeontology and Zoology.

Directions 15

Continue along Cromwell Road. At the junction with Queen's Gate, use the pedestrian crossings to reach Baden-Powell House. Stop outside by the statue.

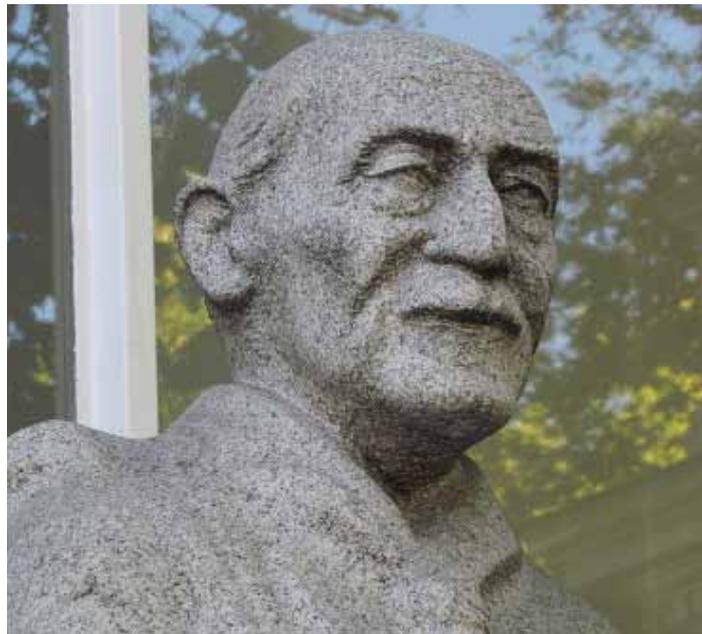
16. Scouting

Baden-Powell House, 65-67 Queen's Gate

This statue commemorates the man who started a movement that has embraced the arts and sciences. Robert Baden-Powell was the founder of the Scouts.

Baden-Powell served in the British Army in both India and Africa. On a return from Africa in 1903 he found that his military training manual, *Aids to Scouting*, had become a best-seller used by teachers and youth organisations. He decided to re-write it to suit a youth readership.

In August 1907 he held a camp on Brownsea Island in Dorset for 22 boys from local Boys Brigade companies and sons of his friends to test out his ideas. This camp is now seen as the beginning of the Scout and Guide Movement.



Robert Baden-Powell statue
© Rory Walsh



A Scout parade in Scotland
Windfield Photographic Collection and Archives (CCL)

His first book, *Scouting for Boys*, was published in six instalments in 1908 and has sold approximately 150 million copies since. It was the fourth-best selling book of the twentieth century.

Though Baden-Powell died in 1941 his legacy lives on. There are now over 31 million registered Scouts and 10 million registered Guides around the world.

This building was the headquarters of The Scout Association until 2001. Now it is a Scouting hostel and conference centre. Inside you can see a collection of Baden-Powell's memorabilia.

Directions 16

Cross back over the road and turn left along Queen's Gate, keeping the Natural History Museum on your right. Stop by the second set of railings by the sign for the Darwin Centre. Look at the modern glass building.

17. A curious egg

Darwin Centre, Natural History Museum

This building is the Darwin Centre, a 2009 expansion to the Natural History Museum. It is named after the naturalist Charles Darwin, who formulated his theory of natural selection after a five-year voyage around the world on the ship HMS Beagle.

Look carefully at the glass front and you should be able to make out a beige structure inside. This 8-storey cocoon is designed to resemble an insect egg. It is the largest sprayed concrete curved structure in Europe.



The Darwin Centre
© Mike Jackson



The Darwin Centre cocoon
© Rory Walsh

At the core of the cocoon are 17 million insects and 3 million plant specimens which have been collected by different people over the last 400 years! Visitors can look at some of the oldest specimens and learn about the people who collected and identified them.

It's worth noting that they are not just museum specimens; many are used by scientists for research into fighting disease and climate change. Prince Albert and Sir Henry Cole would be proud that the institutions of South Kensington keep on thriving and growing.

The Darwin Centre is well worth a visit but to get inside you will need to go via to the Natural History Museum's main entrance on Cromwell Road.

Directions 17

Continue along Queen's Gate. Shortly after passing the Oman Embassy at Number 167, turn right at Falmouth Gate and into Imperial College Road. Stop by the red brick building, Number 170 Queen's Gate.

18. Cementing a place

170 Queen's Gate

Earlier in the walk we saw the Royal School of Mines building. The Royal School of Mines later joined with the Royal College of Science and the City and Guilds College to form The Imperial College of Science and Technology. We are now in part of the Imperial College grounds.

Imperial College is rated amongst the world's best universities. As per the original mandate of the Royal School of Mines, it focuses on engineering, medicine and science. Over time the College has expanded physically and academically.



The White family crest above the door
© Mike Jackson

Today Imperial College has about 13,500 full-time students and 3,330 academic and research staff based throughout Albertopolis. Notice the mixture of buildings around this part of the campus. From this spot we can see modern blocks but also another of its older buildings.

Number 170 Queen's Gate was designed by Norman Shaw who also designed Lowther Lodge, the home of the Royal Geographical Society that we saw earlier. It was completed in 1889 as a house for Frederick Anthony White. His family crest forms part of the decoration above the front door. His and his wife's initials are visible on the rainwater heads rear the roof line.

Frederick Anthony White was a wealthy cement manufacturer who had an interest in art and architecture. So although they look completely different, this Victorian building and the contemporary Darwin Centre that we saw at the last stop are connected – by cement!

Directions 18

Retrace your steps and turn right to continue along Queen's Gate. See if you can spot three more embassies – Thailand, Bangladesh and Bulgaria. Cross the end of Prince Consort Road then turn right into Bremner Road. At the back of the church turn left into Jay Mews. At the end turn right into the main road, Kensington Gore. Stop at the junction before the Royal Albert Hall and look up to the right at the dark concrete and glass building.

19. Designer dirt

Darwin Building, Royal College Art

This modern block is home to the Royal College of Art (RCA), a postgraduate university that specialises in art and design. Despite the building's modern appearance the RCA has a long history. It was founded in 1837 as the Government School of Design and was given its current name in 1896.

The College's Royal Charter is 'to advance learning, knowledge and professional competence particularly in the field of fine arts, in the principles and practice of art and design' in particular through 'research and collaboration with industry and commerce'.

The College has an international reputation for courses in architecture, photography, industrial design, vehicle design, textiles, fashion and ceramics.



Darwin Building, Royal College of Art
© Rory Walsh



RCA alumna Tracey Emin
Piers Allardyce, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Famous graduates include; architect Edwin Lutyens; garden designer Gertrude Jekyll; sculptor Henry Moore; artists David Hockney, Peter Blake and Tracey Emin; fashion designers Ossie Clark and Zandra Rhodes; product designer James Dyson; and film director Ridley Scott.

RCA students designed this campus building. As the home of a creative arts organisation, it might seem rather austere but like the Ismaili Centre we saw earlier it was carefully designed to blend in with the surroundings. This is why the building is quite dark. When the RCA was completed in 1963 the neighbouring Royal Albert Hall and Albert Memorial hadn't been cleaned for almost a century and were very dirty!

Directions 19

Keep the main road on your left and continue a short distance towards the Royal Albert Hall. Stop before the side road and look across at the Hall.

20. The hall of arts and sciences

Royal Albert Hall

At the heart of Albertopolis is the Royal Albert Hall. The hall was fundamental to Prince Albert's vision for the area. It was originally going to be called the Central Hall of Arts and Sciences. As it didn't open until 1871, a decade after Albert's death, Queen Victoria renamed it the Royal Albert Hall of Arts and Sciences.

Look up towards the roof for an inscription written around the building. It starts: 'This hall was erected for the advancement of the arts and sciences and works of industry of all nations in fulfilment of the intention of Albert Prince Consort'.



The Royal Albert Hall
© Rory Walsh

Below the inscription is a terracotta frieze depicting 'The Triumph of Arts and Sciences'. There are 16 themes including music; sculpture; painting; workers in stone; workers in wood and brick; astronomy and navigation; pottery and glassmaking; and horticulture and land surveying. See how many examples you can spot.



A detail of the Royal Albert Hall frieze
© Rory Walsh

The Royal Albert Hall was the venue for four international exhibitions. The final one in 1874 included food and drink - and a large quantity of wine was stored in the cellars. Apparently these bottles were overlooked until the wine growers who had gone to great expense to provide them appealed for help.

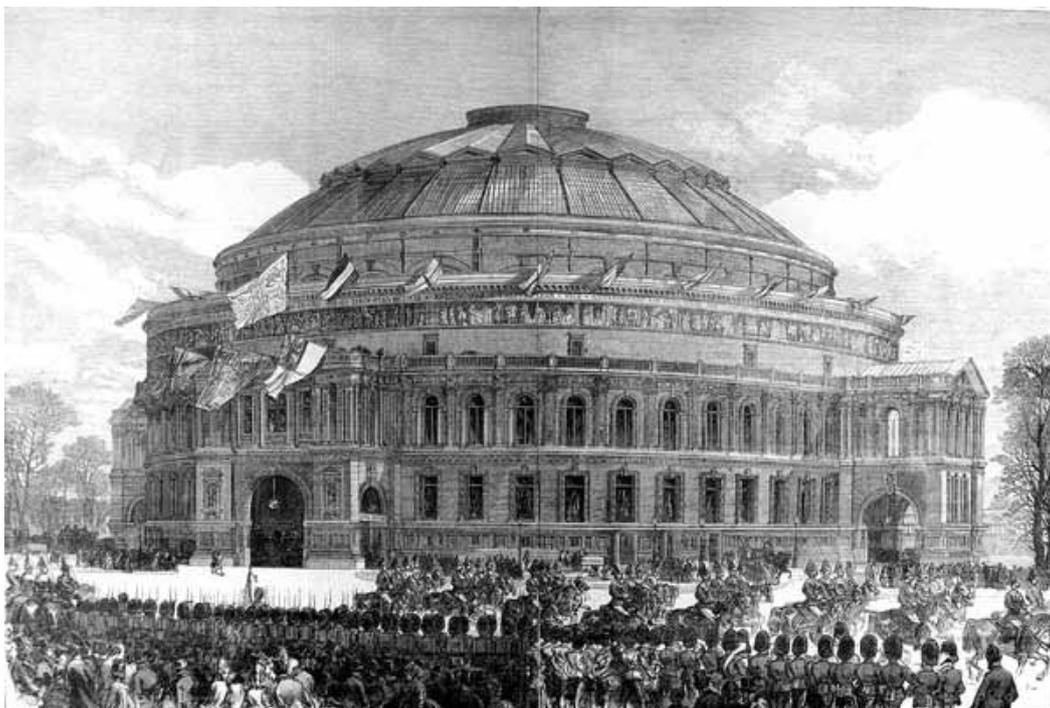
So a series of large lunch parties were arranged where these wines were placed on the table. These luncheons led to the creation of The International Exhibition Co-operative Wine Society which still exists today.

The Royal Albert Hall is one of Britain's most loved and distinctive buildings. It is probably best known as a music venue including the annual Promenade Concerts. These culminate each September with the famously patriotic Last Night of the Proms.

The Hall's fame as a concert venue is despite acoustic problems in its early years. The building's curved walls and domed roof created a serious echo. It was often joked that the Royal Albert Hall was the only place where a composer could be sure of hearing their work twice! The echo was eventually fixed by fitting mushroom-shaped deflectors inside the roof.

Although famous for classical music, the Hall is still a multi-purpose building as Prince Albert intended. Events hosted here include rock and pop concerts, ballet and opera, tennis competitions, award ceremonies, conferences, school and community events, film premieres, charity performances and banquets.

Inside the Hall a large frieze by artist Peter Blake depicts some of the many notable people who have appeared here over almost 150 years.



The Royal Albert Hall's opening ceremony
in 'The London Illustrated News' (29 March 1871)
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Directions 20

Carefully cross over the side road. Keeping the walls of the Royal Albert Hall on your left, continue around until you reach the back of a statue at the top of a set of stone steps.

21. Making music

Royal College of Music and the former Royal College of Organists

Within sight of the Royal Albert Hall are two musical buildings. First, with your back to the Hall, look down the steps at the large red brick building opposite. This is the Royal College of Music. It originated from Prince Albert's proposals for a national music training scheme for young people. Founded in 1882, it is now part of the University of London.



The Royal College of Music
© Mike Jackson

The Royal College of Music is one of the world's leading conservatoires. It provides specialised musical education and professional training at the highest level for performers, conductors and composers. Some of the world's best classical musicians have studied here. Listen carefully and you may be able to hear students playing inside.

Now turn around and face the Royal Albert Hall. Look to the left for an ornately decorated building. This was originally the home of the National Training School for Music. Then from 1904 to 1991 the Royal College of Organists was based there. It is now a private house.



The former Royal College of Organists building
© Rory Walsh

The building was designed by Lieutenant H H Cole, the son of Sir Henry Cole. The distinctive figures on the walls are reliefs and plaster decorations known as sgraffito. There are musical instruments of all sorts, portraits of composers and musical cherubs. But ironically for the home of organ music there is no organ!

Directions 21

For the final stop make your way to the front of the statue.

22. An arts and sciences hub

Great Exhibition memorial beside Royal Albert Hall

We're just a few hundred metres from where we started this walk at the Albert Memorial and here is another statue of the same man.

This is a memorial to the Great Exhibition. Until 1891 it stood in the garden of the Royal Horticultural Society, which used to be on the site of the Royal College of Music. Take a look at the inscription below the statue which sets out how much money was raised from the Great Exhibition.

This is the last stop on our walk around Albertopolis and it is fitting that we end with another statue of Prince Albert. Throughout we have seen how he inspired and shaped this area of South Kensington.



The men with the vision, Prince Albert and Sir Henry Cole
© Rory Walsh / Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

From this statue we can see several buildings that stemmed from Prince Albert and Sir Henry Cole's vision for this area. We discovered how Albertopolis all started with the Great Exhibition in 1851, which showcased Britain's international role in the arts and sciences. From the Exhibition's success this area south of Hyde Park was established as a long term legacy to celebrate science, technology, culture and the arts.

We have seen how Albertopolis is home to some of the world's leading museums, academic institutions and national organisations. Each one of these is continually evolving and expanding, through their buildings and the people who work in, study in and visit them. More than 150 years later Prince Albert and Sir Henry Cole's legacy is still alive and well. Albertopolis is still at the heart of the arts and sciences.

Directions 22

To return to the museums, go down the steps and turn left into Prince Consort Road. The museums and South Kensington underground station are down Exhibition Road to the right. To go to Kensington Gardens, keep the Royal Albert Hall on your right. The park and Albert Memorial are across the road.

Further information

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints United Kingdom

www.lds.org.uk

Exhibition Road

www.exhibitionroad.com

Imperial College London

www3.imperial.ac.uk

The Ismaili Centre

www.theismaili.org

Natural History Museum

www.nhm.ac.uk

Royal Albert Hall

www.royalalberthall.com

Royal College of Music

www.rcm.ac.uk

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

www.rgs.org

Science Museum

www.sciencemuseum.org.uk

The Crystal Palace Museum

www.crystalpalacemuseum.org.uk

Goethe-Institut London

www.goethe.de/ins/gb/lon/enindex.htm

Institut Français

www.institut-francais.org.uk

Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle Londres

www.lyceefrancais.org.uk

The Polish Club

www.ognisko.com

Royal College of Art

www.rca.ac.uk

Royal College of Organists

www.rco.org.uk

The Royal Society of Arts

www.thersa.org

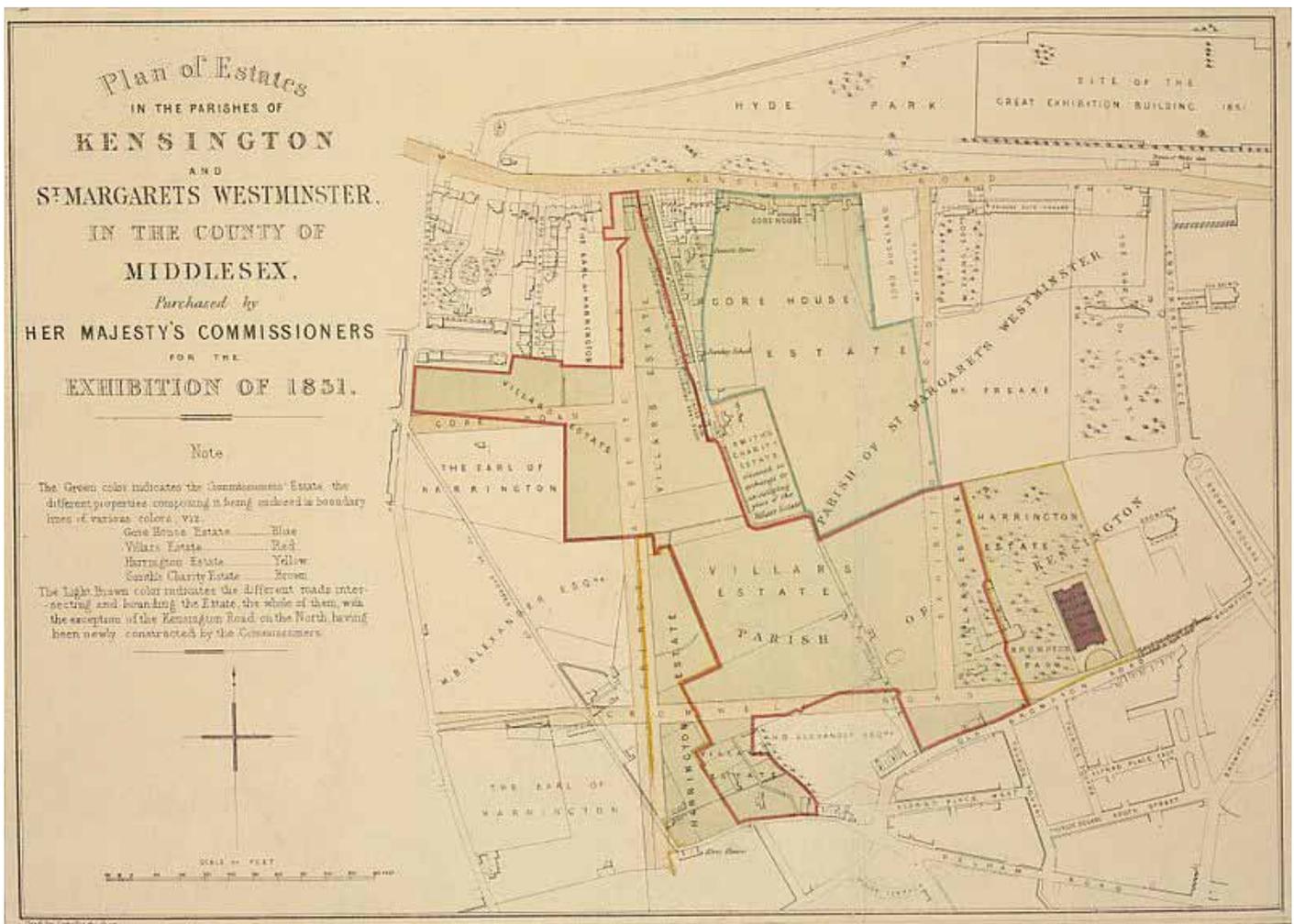
Victoria & Albert Museum

www.vam.ac.uk

Credits

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'Plan of Estates in the Parishes of Kensington and St. Margaret's Westminster in the County of Middlesex Purchased by Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851' showing the land plots bought to develop Albertopolis.
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

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