

## London Central Walk

On one of the hottest days of the year thus far (24 May), a group of 27 ACU3A members took the train to London to explore on foot four of the major parks of the city.

After a brief underground journey to Embankment, the caffeine shot at Westminster Central Hall underground cafeteria revived the group to tackle the walk ahead. Crossing the 'blue' bridge in St. James's Park, we had our first glimpse of Duck Island - a nature reserve hosting the park's bird collection. Two of the park's most charismatic characters were on show: two tiny pelicans dozing in the sunshine at the water's edge.



Our route then took us towards The Mall where we crossed into Green Park. On the way, more exotic wildlife: a grey heron standing motionless on one leg gazing steadfastly at its audience. Continuing through the park, we came across the spectacular memorial to the 55,573 airmen of Bomber Command who lost their lives during World War II, unveiled by the Queen in 2012 in the year of her Diamond Jubilee.



Hyde Park Corner was our next stop where the Australian War Memorial - a beautifully curved wall made of grey-green granite quarried in Western Australia – caught our attention. On it were carved 24,000 place names from which servicemen and women came who fought alongside Britain in the two world wars. An inscription read *'Whatever burden you are to carry we also will shoulder that burden'*.



The surrounding area featured a number of other war memorials, not least - and probably the most famous – Decimus Burton's Wellington Arch.



Flagging somewhat in the heat of the day, our route then took us into Hyde Park itself and a forty-minute stop at the Serpentine restaurant for lunch. Several of the group had taken a picnic and preferred to enjoy it in the shade of the trees. After lunch, we followed the path on the eastern flank of the Serpentine towards the Italian garden and fountains at its northern extremity. Wildlife was everywhere but none seemed remotely troubled by the close proximity of dozens of people walking by taking photographs. And out on the water a coot was tending its young on a nest made of twigs, a Snickers' bar wrapper, an empty crisp packet and a Marks and Spencer plastic bag!



Just before leaving Hyde Park, we paused for a while at the Diana Memorial Fountain, noticing how much the children were enjoying paddling in its rill. Doubtless, she would have heartily approved of this fitting tribute to her life-time interest in young people.



We continued our walk into Kensington Gardens, passing the delightful statue of Peter Pan with its squirrels, rabbits, mice and fairies climbing up to Peter standing on top of a bronze plinth.

On reaching our final destination at the Albert Memorial (a tribute to the much-adored husband of Queen Victoria) we made a brief stop for a group photograph before heading for the train home to beat the rush hour.



It was a great day out in London's lovely parks and gardens. Thank you to Pat Worrell and Tony Southgate for leading the walk and to Barbara Brooker for organizing the travel arrangements.

Janet Cato - May 2017

Pictures by Mick Stallwood