VICTORIA THE GREAT

Clive Aslet

Victoria
LONDON STARTS HERE

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by Clive Aslet

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"Victoria-street should be seen to be understood, for it is at present one of the sights of London….The surprise of pleasure which we felt in our first solitary survey of the new street was something wonderful."

Illustrated London News, September 6, 1851

"Of all the departure platforms in all the stations in Britain, this one is probably the most hallowed. It was once the famous 'Gateway to the Continent,' from where glamorous trains to far-off places, such as the Golden Arrow and the Night Ferry, used to depart…Who knew what double agent, film star, diplomat or billionaire might be snuggling up in the sleeping compartment next to yours?"

Michael Williams, *On the Slow Train*, 2010 (of Platform 2, Victoria Station)

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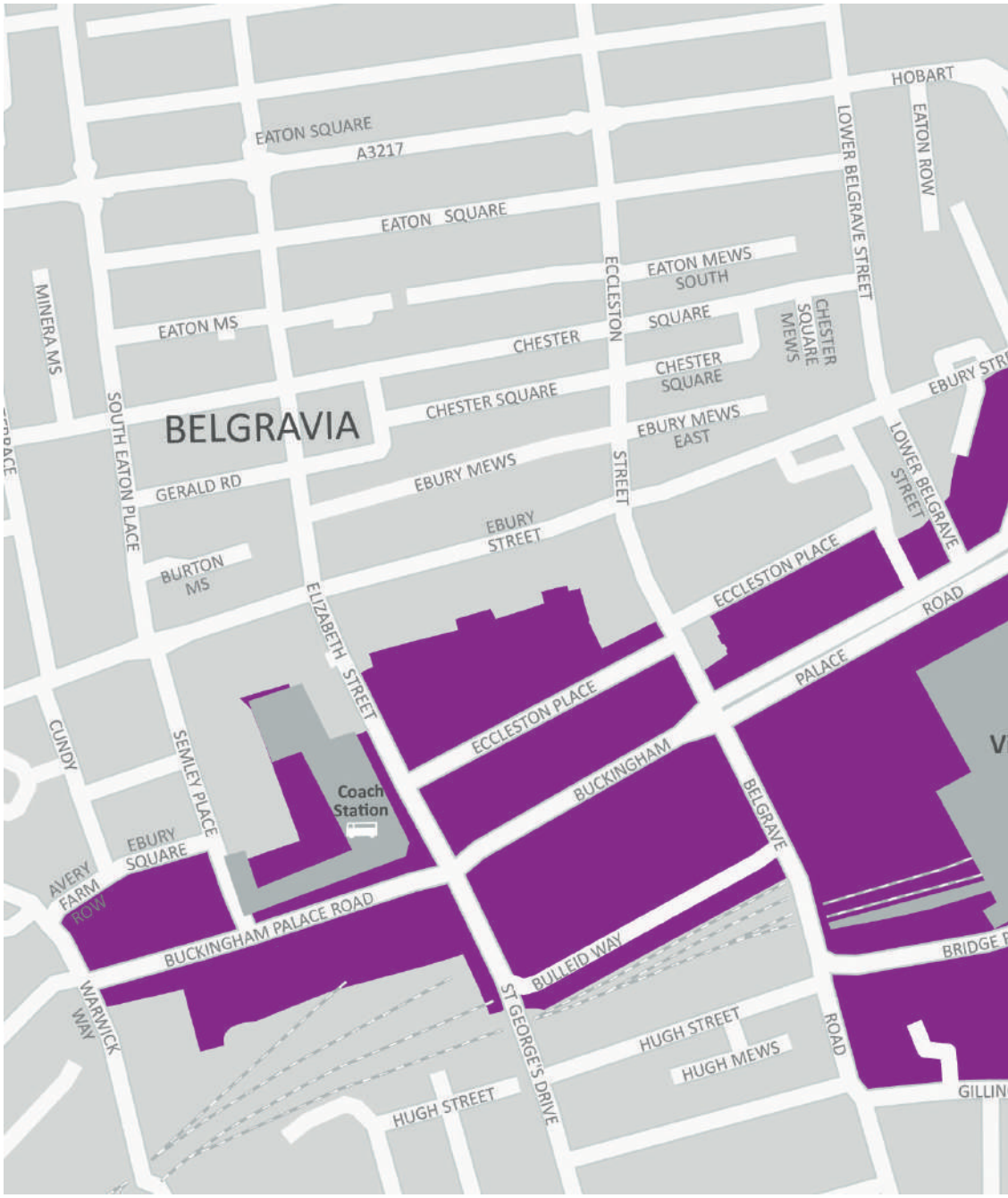

FIG 1
Map of the Victoria Business Improvement District's (VBID) 'footprint', stretching from Warwick Way in the west along Buckingham Palace Road and Victoria Street as far as Buckinghm Gate in the north east.


Buckingham
Palace Gardens
PLACE
GROSVENOR GARDENS
LOWER GROSVENOR PLACE
BUCKINGHAM GATE
BEESTON PLACE
VICTORIA SQUARE
EATON LANE
BURY STREET
GROSVENOR GARDENS
WARWICK ROW
BRESSENDEN PLACE
ALLINGTON STREET
STAFFORD PLACE
CATHERINE PLACE
BUCKINGHAM
BIRDCAGE WK
WILFRED STREET
PALACE STREET
CASTLE LANE
TERMINUS PLACE
VICTORIA STREET
ALLINGTON STREET
PETTY FRANCE
GATE
VANDON STREET
PALMER STREET
St. James's Park
ST ERM. HL
Victoria Station
WILTON ROAD
VICTORIA STREET
ASHLEY PLACE
SPENSER STREET
VAUXHALL BRIDGE
KING'S SCHOLARS' PASSAGE
CARLISLE PLACE
MORPETH TERRACE
AMBROSDEN AVENUE
THIRLEBY ROAD
HOWICK PLACE
BROADWAY
VICTORIA STREET
BRIDGE
GILLINGHAM STREET
WESTMINSTER

Foreword

Ruth Duston

Chief Executive, Victoria BID

Places - the buildings, the people, and everything in between - have fascinated me for much of my career. We have all heard of placemaking, and unfortunately it is a term that is in danger of being overused (and misused), but making 'places' is not something that just happens. To this end, BIDs are placemaking pioneers and in Victoria we are fortunate to have some great partners who are working collaboratively to make Victoria the great 'place' we all know it has the potential to be.

There are several components needed for a place and its people to thrive. While many of these are often modern day interventions such as ensuring the right infrastructure, improving public spaces and amenities and providing a good mix of retail, hospitality, business space and homes, there is no question that an area's heritage also plays a crucial role.

It's for this reason the BID commissioned this fascinating history book.

But this is a history book with a difference. Not only does it reveal some of the previously untold or little known stories about one of the most well-known districts in the capital, it also shows how a place's history has a direct impact on its future.

When I first started working in Victoria the area was dominated by government buildings and it was a rather dreary, grey landscape. It was, sadly, a rather forgotten part of central London, and certainly not seen as a destination. The rather uninspiring 1960s architecture belied a rich history stretching back centuries, with strong royal connections and a key role in the development of the nation's seat of democracy.

Fast forward ten years and much of the modern day area has changed. This sense of evolution is the latest chapter in the story of Victoria. Victoria has long been a place of change

Fig 2
Aeriel view of London (north east) with the Zig Zag building (centre), opened in 2015 from behind 123 Victoria Street which was constructed in 1975 but was refurbished in 2012 into a dynamic retail and office space.

and transformation. A place not standing still but pioneering and striding forward.

From its early origins featuring unimposing cottages and market gardens to it being chosen as the site for the Palace of Westminster and even the location of possibly the first roundabout in the UK, the story of Victoria is fascinating, complex and revealing. I am struck by how surprising some of the discoveries are and how Victoria continues to surprise today.

As we look to the next period of change - including the exciting possible establishment of the Victoria Westminster BID, this book enables us to discover what has come before. Who were the pioneers of the area? Who shaped the landscape?

In this strange time of political and economic uncertainty, fake news, flash in the pan fads and rapid technological progress, what are the old stories we should remember and celebrate as we all search for more authenticity and something 'real'?

As Britain forges a new path following the Brexit referendum, I don't think there can be any better time to reinforce the sense of place and identity of our beloved part of the capital.

1. Naming Victoria

Victoria is different.

London is famously a city of villages. As the megalopolis sprawled outwards in the nineteenth century, it absorbed but did not wholly devour the outlying settlements. Hampstead remains definably Hampstead, Richmond unmistakably Richmond.

But Victoria SW1 is not part of this tapestry. It has never been a village. Yes, everyone recognises it as a distinctive district, and there is – as this book will explore – a fascinating backstory to the area in the centuries before it started to take what is now its discernible form; but here is not a case of an ancient settlement retaining its look and identity while being pulled further and further into London's embrace.

A strong clue to Victoria's origins lies in the name, which comes, of course, from the nineteenth century queen. But this again is unusual. It had been common practice in the Middle Ages to honour saints, local grandees and warrior-kings by naming places after them; and this continued throughout the British Empire (although the place names were more likely to remember colonial administrators than saints). But it ceased to be the way things were done at home. Simply to give somewhere a person's bald name, without so much as adding a 'ville' or 'town' as suffix, is distinctly rare. It reflects the absence of any other handle – other than perhaps Tothill Fields – by which this area could be known before Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837.

The name simply arose. It was not imposed by a sycophantic local worthy or politician seeking to curry favour with the royal court. Rather, in an appropriately Victorian way, it followed rather than anticipated the two great works of infrastructure that effectively created the area as we understand it today: the construction of a major new east-west road and the opening of a vast railway terminus.

Fig 3
Pigeon's eye view of Cardinal Place (on the right) and the Westminster Cathedral Piazza (centre foreground). The gleaming geometry of the Nova buildings, which contain offices, apartments and restaurants, can be seen in the middle of the photograph, to the right of Victoria Station.

Fig 4
Marshall Foch (unveiled in 1930), Supreme Commander of the Allied Armies in the First World War, overlooks the Nova development from the greenery of Grosvenor Gardens. The original statue by George Malissard remains in Ypres.

Because the street (which came first) was named after the young queen, the station followed suit, as much to proclaim its proximity to Victoria Street as to honour Her Majesty. Naturally, the area around which Victoria Street and Victoria Station converged became known as Victoria.

So here was not an ancient community being plugged into the modern world and promoted with the imprimatur of royal trappings, but rather something far closer to the creation of a new neighbourhood whose name demonstrates its modernity. The image of Queen Victoria that first comes to mind may, nowadays, be that of an austere and elderly royal matriarch ruling – somewhat remotely – over vast imperial domains, but when the builders of Victoria Street honoured her in 1851 she was still a relatively youthful thirty-two. This was the year of the Great Exhibition, and the name Victoria represented novelty, freshness and innovation rather than a rather stolid, if reassuring, stability and weighty permanence. It could scarcely have been a more fitting name for an up-and-coming neighbourhood in the nation's capital.

2. The West Minster

The name of Victoria derives ultimately from Queen Victoria. It was given first to Victoria Street, then Victoria Station and finally to the area round about. And these royal associations are reinforced by the geography of London: Victoria lies between two royal palaces – Buckingham Palace and the Palace of Westminster.

Do these royal connections resonate with the thousands of office workers who tread Victoria's pavements each day? They may well be unaware of them. This indifference can be forgiven. For Victoria does not trumpet its royal connections; no flagpoles line Victoria Street, as they do The Mall, no crowns or other royal insignia decorate the lampposts. Central Victoria is not, in London terms, enormously old, and its landlords have never been over-sentimental about its buildings; most of Victoria Street was redeveloped in the 1960s, and has now been rebuilt again.

Before the nineteenth century, this hardly looked an area that invited development. It was boggy, prone to flooding and occupied by little beyond cottages and market gardens (latterly joined by a House of Correction, a prison and a brewery). Yet the riverside was chosen as the site not just for a palace but a religious foundation supported by royalty: Westminser Abbey. The presence of the palace and the abbey encouraged settlement, although it did not spread far inland until after the Dissolution of the Monasteries; successive Abbots did little to develop their landholding, which included much of what later became the West End.

It was King Edgar who founded Westminster Abbey, around 970 AD. As yet, the course of the river was ill-defined. It would not be constrained between embankments until the mid-nineteenth century. Instead, the Thames sprawled across a wide bed, the fringes of which were a flood plain of marshlands and mudflats. Tributaries such

Fig 5
Perspective view of the old Palace of Westminster in the reign of King Henry VIII. Seen from the east, from the south entrance on the left to the clock tower in New Palace Yard on the right. Westminster Abbey, St Margaret's and the Holbein Gateway in the background. Published by The Builder magazine in 1884.

as the Tyburn trickled in – but they also lacked energy: the Tyburn had split into three branches before it reached the Thames. Among the mudflats were banks of gravel, which made islands or eyots. One of them was Thorney (the –ey suffix signifies island), and it was here that the Abbey of West Minster was built – or rebuilt. The name indicates that it stood to the west of the old Saxon trading post of Ludenwic, which had been established north of the present-day Strand and Fleet Street (under King Alfred the Great it was moved to a better-defended site behind the Roman walls of the City). There had been a church on Thorney before – a minster, served by lay clerks rather than monks. Although Edgar's new abbey was monastic, it retained 'minster' in its name.

Later monks liked to credit Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, as being the prime mover behind their abbey; yet Edgar deserves equal credit. Westminster was one of a number of religious foundations that he endowed as a means of bolstering his authority. Crucially for

the development of London, the endowment included all the land lying between the Fleet river on the east and the Tyburn on the west, and what is now Oxford Street on the north and the Thames on the south. Until the 1820s, the Abbey took its water from a spring in what is now Hyde Park, a considerable distance from the Abbey buildings. The Abbey's ownership of the estate prevented development; after the Reformation of the Monasteries under Henry VIII – and then the great area of open land provided a space from which to form the royal parks, originally for keeping deer: St James's Park, Green Park, Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. Other parts of the Abbey's land remained fields and market gardens scattered with hospitals, pubs and hovels; Tothill Fields would not be systematically developed as Victoria until the nineteenth century.

"Do these royal connections resonate with the thousands of office workers who tread Victoria's pavements each day?"

Edgar's abbey was swept away in the eleventh century by King Edward the Confessor. Dedicating it to St Peter, he had a huge ambition for his foundation: the new abbey would be on a scale barely known north of the Alps. It was where he wished to be buried.

Edward had been crowned at Winchester on Easter Day, 1043 – a mature man of thirty-eight (an age that no recent English king except his father had reached) but young enough to be physically vigorous, indefatigable in the hunt, with a temper that was greatly feared. He would soon be married to a beautiful, much younger Queen Edith. There were no children from the marriage. Since Edith had ambitious brothers, this was not the marriage's only source of grief. Edward had grown up in Normandy, sheltering from the Vikings who had taken he throne. Although austere in his own tastes, he had experienced the sophistication of the Norman court, and witnessed its mania for founding abbeys – built out of stone in preference to the Saxon material of wood.

As king, Edward's power was sometimes eclipsed by that of his wife's family – but he still had authority over religious matters, in which he took an increasing interest as he got older. His demeanour became saintly. But it was not only the Abbey that he founded at Westminster. Next to it he built a palace, in the Norman style; there is a diagrammatic image of it in the Bayeux Tapestry.

The close association of an abbey with a palace was not entirely unknown; in Fécamp, as Edward must have known, the Dukes of Normandy had the Abbey that was the burial place in the same enclose as their major palace. But it would come to seem highly unusual. It was not a pattern that other European monarchies would follow. Scottish kings were crowned at Scone and buried at a number of abbeys, while the emerging capital was Edinburgh. In France, coronations were held at Reims, while the royal burial site was the Abbey of St Denis – outside the administrative centre of the Ile de la Cité in Paris. In the course of the Middle Ages, the palace of Westminster became the site of a permanent legislature and administration. The concentration of royal power, symbolic and actual, at Westminster would be a stimulus to trade, since accommodation was needed for the lawyers and civil servants, other functionaries and tradesmen, whom it attracted. A network of streets would grow up around the skirts of the Abbey and royal demesne.

Edward was too ill to attend the consecration of the Abbey in the last days of 1065. When he died in January 1066, he was entombed in a stone sarcophagus buried in front of the high altar. This began a tradition of royal burials that would turn Westminster Abbey into the national Valhalla. Another tradition was established when Edward's successor, King Harold, was crowned there. Only a year later, William the Conqueror, determined to establish his legitimacy, followed suit. (William's coronation was unfortunate. Guards mistook the shout of acclaim for a rebellion and massacred a large number of the spectators.) Since 1066, the only monarchs not to have been crowned in the Abbey are Edward V (who was murdered in the Tower of London by Richard III) and Edward VIII.

In 1163 Edward was himself canonized. His body was removed from its tomb (the tomb had, for some reason, been opened before, in 1102, when a 'wonderful fragrance' filled the church; presumably the body had been embalmed or filled with aromatic herbs and spices) and it was transferred to a shrine. There is reason to think that, while important, it was not hugely popular as a pilgrimage site: the Abbey's most valuable relics, such as the Holy Blood that was sent by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, had nothing to do with St Edward. Nevertheless, as a saint who was also a king, he was an object of special devotion by subsequent monarchs. The message was made clear by the Abbey's late twelfth century seal, which shows St Edward trampling on his father-in-law, Earl Godwin: subjects who challenge the authority of the crown are crushed by divine power. It was an idea that particularly appealed to

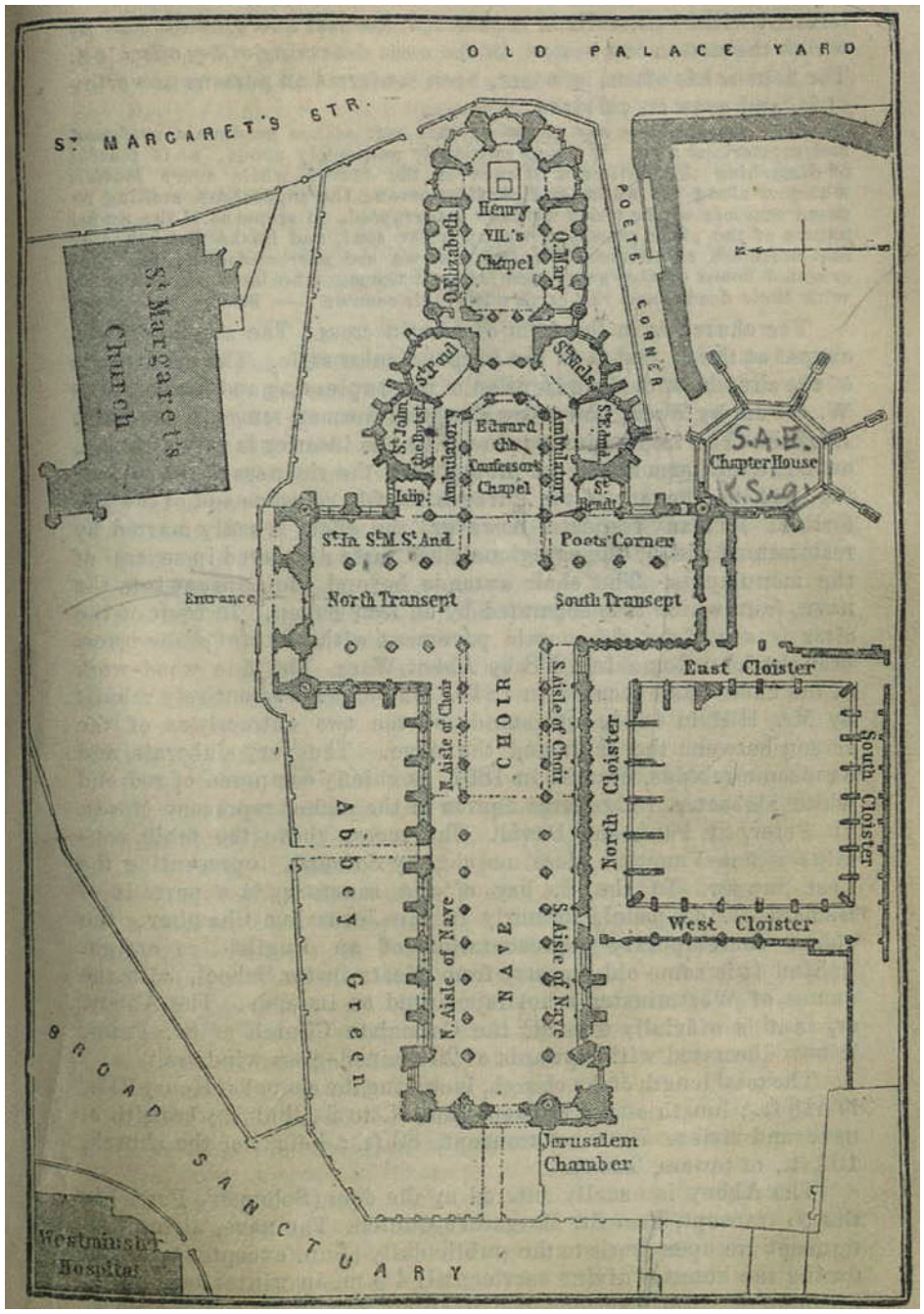

Fig 6
Westminster Abbey from Baedeker, Karl. Baedeker's London and Its Environs. Ninth Revised Edition. Leipsic, 1894.

Henry III, whose father, Henry II, had been forced into a public display of penitence after the murder of Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury.

While Henry III was still a boy – he was only nine when he came to the throne in 1216 – the monks began to improve the abbey, adding a now vanished Lady Chapel. But the King took over the project on a far grander scale. Although Henry venerated his predecessor Edward the Confessor, now a saint, he appears to have had no qualms in replacing his Norman abbey with a towering structure, larger and more lavish, inspired by works of French royal patronage, such as the cathedral at Reims and the Crown of Thorns, the Sainte Chapelle, in Paris. From 1245, a prodigiously expensive building campaign saw the construction of a new east end of the Abbey: apse, transepts, crossing and part of the nave. At 103ft, it is the tallest of all England's Gothic churches. We know the name of the mason who laid it out: Henry of Reyns. It is not clear, though, whether he came from Reims or had only worked there – or did he even hail from Rayne in Essex? He was lucky in his patron. The King was an aesthete who loved jewels, fine cloths and works of art, and the sanctuary floor of his new abbey was enriched with mosaic Cosmati work laid by craftsmen specially brought over from Italy.

"...a focus of royal ceremony... a temple of national genius."

The kings who followed Edward the Confessor, although crowned at Westminster, had not been buried there. William the Conqueror, who died in agony after the high pommel of his horse's saddle ruptured his gut while he was campaigning at Mantes, is buried in Normandy. William Rufus, killed by an arrow in the New Forest, lies in Winchester. King John, who died of dysentery at Newark, had already chosen to rest under the protection of St Oswald and St Wulfstan in Worcester Cathedral. But conveniently enough, Henry III died at Westminster, and was buried near the shrine of Edward the Confessor in the abbey whose rebuilding he had undertaken so spectacularly – although it had not yet been completed. He lies under a splendid tomb of Purbeck marble, enriched with slabs of antique porphyry in purple and green and inlays of coloured marble and glass. The king's effigy was covered in gold. From now on, Westminster Abbey would be the burial place of the English monarchs – a tradition that was expanded in the seventeenth century, celebrating great men and women of all kinds.

Work continued after Henry III's death in

Fig 7
The vaults of Westminster Abbey, at the crossing. While several English cathedrals have a lantern tower (with windows) at the crossing, Westminster Abbey's lantern was never built. There have been several unexecuted proposals for a central tower.

1272, but only slowly; the old Norman nave at the west was still attached to Henry's much taller east end. A century later, a new impetus was given to the project; the mason Henry Yevele, who also worked at Canterbury and Winchester Cathedrals, was commissioned to finish it – which he almost did, continuing the original style. His work is in places slightly simpler, although on the outside it can be distinguished by the badges that are attached to the string course below the parapet; he also preferred the more durable Portland stone to the inferior Reigate regrettably chosen by Henry III. Yevele was unable to build the west towers; these were not erected until the 1730s, when the task fell to Nicholas Hawksmoor. Although a Baroque architect, he saw the importance of achievieng an aesthetic whole: he based his design on the west front of Beverley Minster.

Post-Henry III, the great stylistic innovation at Westminster was the chapel added by Henry VII, with a fan-vaulted roof that floats out like a canopy, and is worked with what almost seems like a tapestry of ornament. It was intended as the burial place for Henry VI, but in the event, the tomb that occupies the central position is that of Henry VII.

During the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the effigy of Henry V was stripped of the silver plate that encased it, along with its head of solid silver; although the Abbey's royal associations meant that much of its fabric was largely spared. It even survived the Commonwealth. After the Restoration, it not only regained its position as a focus of royal ceremonial but began to evolve a new identity, as a temple of national genius. Our most celebrated statesmen, soldiers, explorers, philanthropists, poets, composers, scientists, Sir Rowland Hill who championed the penny post are remembered in statues and inscriptions. The result is a kind of marmoreal cocktail party, to which only people of achievement are invited.

It was not enough to cheer up Joseph Addison, when he contributed an essay to the Spectator in 1711. Having amused himself by watching a grave being dug, he was chilled to see 'in every Shovel-full of it that was thrown up, the Fragment of a Bone or Skull intermixt with a kind of fresh mouldering Earth that some time or other had a place in the Composition of an human Body. Upon this, I began to consider with myself what innumerable Multitudes of People lay confused together under the Pavement of that ancient Cathedral; how Men and Women, Friends and Enemies, Priest and Soldiers, Monks and Prebendaries, were crumbled amongst one another, blended together in the same common Mass; how Beauty, Strength, and Youth, with Old-age, Weakness, and Deformity, lay undistinguished

Fig 8
The western towers of Westminster Abbey were added by the Baroque architect Nicholas Hawksmoor in the 1730s. To preserve the aesthetic integrity of the Gothic building, he took inspiration from Beverley Minster.

in the same promiscuous Heap of Matter.'

Or as the poet Francis Beaumont put it, somewhat less creepily, in the early seventeenth century:

Mortality, behold and fear!
What a change of flesh is here:
Think how many royal bones
Sleep within these heaps of stones

The royal bones may have slept, but the Abbots of Westminster were wide awake. They were a powerful influence on the development of what would become Victoria.

Westminster Abbey Works under Ptolemy Dean

During the Spring of 2018, work was being finished on a new triforium gallery at Westminster Abbey: this museum will be reached by an access tower, designed by the Surveyor to Westminster Abbey, Ptolemy Dean. It will be the first tower to have been added since Hawksmoor built the West front in the eighteenth century.

And this will be only the first of a suite of improvements to reshape the experience that visitors – be they tourists or worshippers – have of the Abbey, in line with its UNESCO World Heritage status. It is hoped a new sacristy will be built, on the site of Henry III's great sacristy. (In the Middle Ages, a variety of structures crowded around the outside of the Abbey, of which this was one. It owes its present setting to the demolitions that took place in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.) This will enable much of the clutter, such as stacking chairs, to be cleared away when not in use. Visitors will buy their tickets here, rather than inside the Abbey. They will enter by the West door rather than the North door: the length and height of the Abbey – Britain's tallest church – will become apparent at first glance. Ropes will be removed. The space will flow freely again, as it did when Henry III built the nave.

This campaign coincides with other proposed developments. One being the closing of Abingdon Street which would reunite the Abbey with the Palace of Westminster, bringing together the two elements of Edward the Confessor's visions, at present sundered by a road. The other, the very desirable rerouting of traffic at the junction of Broad Sanctuary – as the continuation of Victoria Street is known – and Parliament Square). *See Chapter 11.*

3. The Greatest Hall in Europe

Nothing can be seen of Edward the Confessor's palace, but in the last decade of the eleventh century, an altogether less saintly monarch, William the Conqueror's son, William II, known as Rufus from his red hair or complexion, began building Westminster Hall; in 1099 he came over from France to hold his first court in it. The structure must have astonished contemporaries. It was two hundred and forty feet long and sixty-seven feet six inches wide. The original outer walls survive, behind later re-facings, in those of the present Westminster Hall. There was no other hall of this scale in England, and probably none in Europe, when it was built.

The project was also exceptional for the emphasis it gave to a pre-existing palace. Elsewhere, as at Winchester and Gloucester, the Normans built castles to dominate the major Saxon centres: for a time, they operated in tandem with the palaces built under the previous regime – but eventually they supplanted them. Westminster follows a different path. There was a great Norman castle, the Tower of London, constructed within the Roman walls of the City of London; but the palace at Westminster never lost status to its military rival. The seed of London's bipolar identity, with commerce concentrated in the City and royal, ceremonial, legal and administrative activities focused on Westminster, had been sown.

In general appearance, the Norman hall was considerably different from that of today. There was no hammerbeam roof: that was added by Richard II. William Rufus's masons were not able to create a roof of this span without the support of aisles, which divided the internal space. Light came from an arcaded gallery of round-headed windows that probably ran around all four sides. Outside, the columns of the aisle were matched by buttresses to help take the thrust of the roof. Such a building would have seemed an awe-inspiring

Fig 9
King William Rufus with miniature Westminster Hall, Matthew Paric (c1200-1259), from the collection at the British Library.

achievement to the abbots and archbishops, the earls, thanes and knights, whom William Rufus entertained there.

Later chroniclers liked to portray William Rufus as dismissing his creation, with megalomaniac insouciance, as not nearly big enough. Those stories must be apocryphal: adduced to illustrate the folly of a generally bad king. In fact, the capabilities of the masons were stretched to construct so great a building as it was. Evidence of this is a serious mistake that they made in aligning the columns and buttresses. Those on the west side are four foot adrift from those on the east. The most likely explanation, suggested by Howard Colvin in The History of the King Works, is that the Norman hall was built around an existing building that continued to function as work progressed. This would have made it difficult for the masons to take accurate measurements from one side to another. William Rufus was perhaps lucky to have a hall that, unlike so many other ambitious medieval structures, did not collapse. It could not be said that the Norman kings lived at Westminster. Like their Anglo-Saxon predecessors, they were constantly on the move between their different possessions, as the needs of government and the enjoyment of hunting dictated. Westminster Hall was built to impress, and it would have been used for great ceremonial

gatherings, notably feasts on the anniversary of his coronation, at which the king sought to dazzle the great ones of the land.

There was as yet no fixed administrative centre for the kingdom. The seat of government was where the king happened to be at the time. At this date the principal administrative activity was the sending of the king's letters, which did not require much infrastructure. The only aspect of the court that could not be easily transported was the treasure, which remained at Winchester. It was not, however, Winchester that became the centre for the bureaucracy that expanded rapidly under later kings. The principal function of government was the Exchequer, and that was established at Westminster. It developed its own treasury, which finally absorbed the Winchester one in the reign of King John. Though subsequent monarchs owned many royal manors and palaces, Westminster held pride of place until Henry VIII moved his court to the Palace of Whitehall, leaving Westminster to the civil servants. Whitehall was not, of course, far away.

"Such was the scale and durability of William's achievement that his Hall remained virtually unaltered for two hundred years."

Such was the scale and durability of William's achievement that his Hall remained virtually unaltered for two hundred years. It had received various accretions, for the sake of privacy and comfort and to house departments such as the Exchequer, the Court of Common Pleas and the King's Bench. Now, at the end of the fourteenth century, the Hall itself was looking, to Richard II's sophisticated eye, distinctly old–fashioned. The detail was Romanesque, the proportions squat and the interior was encumbered with columns. His first contribution was to commission a series of stone statues of kings, showing all the monarchs from Edward the Confessor until himself. They were made by Thomas Canon, a marbler from Dorset, and painted by Nicholas Tryer; half a dozen of them can still be seen. Each of these great figures wears a tall, deeply carved crown that would once have been brightly gilded; from their shoulders flowed emerald green and crimson robes. Tryer was paid not much less for decorating the statues than Canon was for carving them. Alas, their sumptuous pigmentation has long since disappeared.

The statues were but a modest prelude to

the great work of rebuilding the roof. There is some reason to suppose that the weight of the old roof had finally come to push the walls outwards, making repairs necessary. The need for repair may have sown the idea of total replacement. But the new work went far, far beyond what was structurally necessary. It entailed nothing less than the construction of English medieval carpentry's grand masterpiece: not only, as Colvin notes, the largest hammerbeam roof in Northern Europe, but as far as we can tell the first. The master mason responsible for the stonework side of the project was Henry Yevele, then in his seventies. He was more than a craftsman, having supervised many great royal and other building projects over the previous decades; now he was so old that he worked with the master mason Walton Warden as his assistant. Yevele heightened the walls, refaced them and built the heavy buttresses that would sustain the roof. He studded the whole with carved emblems belonging to Richard II and the Plantagenet kings. Towers were built to either side of the doorway, which became a ceremonial entrance somewhat in the manner of a cathedral.

The roof itself was the work of Master Hugh Herland. Spanning so great a width was a prodigious achievement, which provided a large area of open floor below. The glory of it, however, resides not just in the structural accomplishment but in the design: tiers of hammerbeams are combined with lateral arched braces, creating a grand and satisfying rhythm, a note of mystery being added by the half–light through which it is all seen. We can follow the construction of the roof through the accounts. The timbers were shaped at a workshop near Farnham called The Frame. Hundreds of oak trees were brought thither from woods around London. Once the component parts of the roof had been carved, they were taken to the Thames by cart, and then to Westminster by river. The weight of the roof has been estimated at six hundred and sixty tons, so the transport alone was quite a feat. Scaffolding was erected in 1395–96.

The poet Geoffrey Chaucer, who served as comptroller of the customs for the port of London, knew both Yevele and Herland. As John Hardy wrote in his biography of Yevele, published in 1944 the great carpenter *did for our architecture what Chaucer did for our language, giving to it a special character which was altogether national, even though it was part of a common European heritage, like the other arts and sciences.*

By building the roof, Richard II created more space in the Hall beneath it. The piers that had supported the old roof were swept away. This enhanced the functionality of the building, at a time when the uses to which it was being put were

FIG 10
Westminster Hall in the Palace of Westminster, 1808, Rowlandson and Pugin.

Fig 11
Engraving of Westminster Hall with a full audience during the trial of Lord Lovat. Lord Lovat's trial for treason took seven days and on the final day he was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

growing. The all-important Exchequer, responsible for tax revenues, had been based here since the reign of Henry III; administration increased with the need to pay for the Hundred Years War. It had also become the centre of the legal system. A permanent judiciary was established at Westminster by Henry II (previously, the courts had followed the monarch of his progress around the country). As a result, Westminster Hall staged many famous trials – from that of William Wallace, who led the Scots against Edward I, to that of Sir Thomas More in 1535 and Charles I in 1649. These showstoppers were but the most visible expression of a veritable legal industry whose machinery was kept perpetually in motion.

The court of Chancery occupied one corner of the Hall, the court of the King's Bench another. The Hall also served as a market, with stallholders selling hats, spectacles, knick-knacks, books and other wares. The bustle and noise are almost unimaginable to the modern visitor, confronted by a space as empty as it is big and used as little more than a vast corridor to connect one part of the Palace to another. It waits in silence for the one or two great state occasions that, in the course of a year, will bring it back to life.

The presence of Westminster Palace stimulated development. Bishops and noblemen built houses by the side of the Thames, from

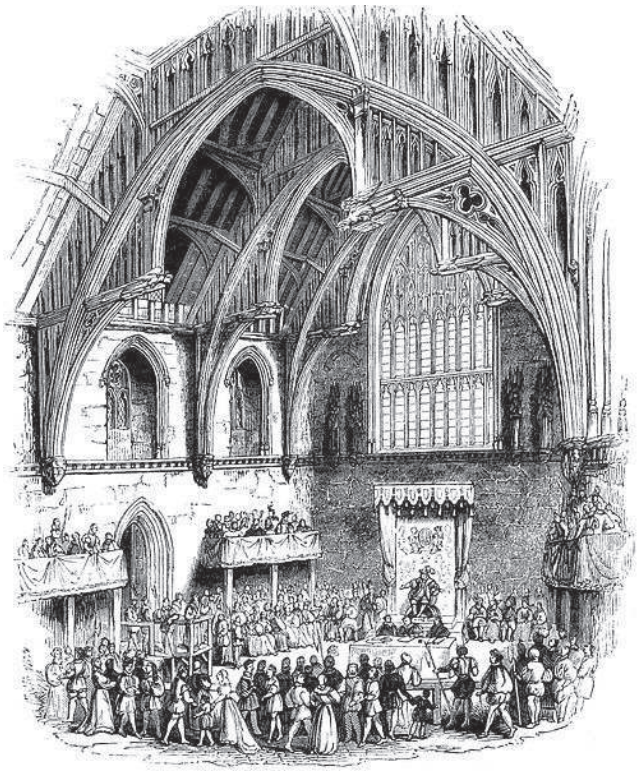

Fig 12
Interior of Westminster Hall, as seen during the Trial of Lambert (before Henry VIII). From the book "London (Volume VI)" by Charles Knight. Lambert was put on trial for denying the real presence of Christ. He was burned at the stake and is famous for his dying words: "*none but Christ, none but Christ*".

Westminster to the City. But the palace blocked the Abbey's access to London's main artery of communication, the river. And the Abbey terminated the King's Road that followed the line of the river, east to west. So little was built in what is now Pimlico beyond the Abbot's own manor of La Neyte, and there was no road running inland. Successive Abbots, though keen to boost the Abbey's income where they could, failed to see potential in developing the fields that, from the eighteenth century, became the West End. London remained principally the City, separated from the small, specialist entity that was Westminster.

But activity around the Abbey's skirts was intense.

4. Around the Skirts of the Abbey

At the zenith of its estates, Westminster Abbey probably owned more than sixty thousand acres of land, most of it farmed – more than enough to support the eighty or so monks, whose number had dwindled to thirty by the time of the Dissolution. From the reign of King Edgar, as we have seen, this included the land on which Victoria would develop, as well as most of what became the West End of London.

The monks improved their land, for example by draining Bulinga Fen; many centuries later this would become the site of Westminster Cathedral. But the Abbots did not deem that it was worth developing a planned settlement on their estate – which now seems surprising, in view of what London has subsequently become, but reflects the dominance of the City of London, then residential as well as commercial; the river was by far the easiest means of communication, and when bishops and great noblemen built 'inns' or palaces, it was strategically more valuable to locate them between Westminster and the City walls, rather than beyond the Abbey, let alone inland. The Palace and, to some extent, the Abbey attracted many visitors – administrators, lawyers, people defending or prosecuting suits, clergy, bailiffs and so on. Not all of them stayed long, and even the lawyers were only required during the legal terms. Only a few needed houses – like such servants of the Abbey as Edward the reeve, Walekin sergeant of the Almonry, William the Abbot's usher and Simon of the gaol. In 1246, the King purchased a house for Henry of Rheims, the architect of the new Abbey. For the most part, Abbots wanting to extract an income from their possessions in the immediate vicinity of the Abbey buildings looked elsewhere – to fairs, inns and the right of sanctuary.

All churches could offer sanctuary – the power to resist arrest – up to a point, and some

FIG 13
Detail of Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg's map of London showing Westminster in 1572.

cathedrals could protect those claiming it for forty days; but Westminster Abbey was unique in being able to offer unlimited sanctuary to people fleeing the king's justice. This did not only include thieves and murderers – although the name of the now disappeared Thieving Lane, which ran along one side of the almonry, is suggestive. Merchants and shopkeepers could escape their creditors and the manor court by taking refuge within the Abbey precincts. There grew to be three sanctuaries; Broad Sanctuary, The Sanctuary and The Little Sanctuary all survive in modern street names. Some people made their homes there and stayed for decades. In 1489, all the fishmongers of Westminster had their premises within the sanctuary, presumably to avoid the penalties for selling inferior merchandise. To quote Gervase Rosser's Medieval Westminster: 'Throughout the later Middle Ages, the sanctuary of Westminster remained an island of ungoverned commerce: to the poor huckster, a zone of free enterprise; to the city merchant, a "tax haven".' For which the monks collected over £100 a year in rents.

"...Westminster was famous for its inns."

When the Abbot led church processions, he was preceded by all the sanctuary men; they were dressed in clothes bearing the crossed keys of St Peter – an apt symbol. Occasionally sanctuary was desecrated. In 1378, fifty soldiers burst into the Abbey precincts in search of Robert Hauley and John Shakell, two squires in the Black Prince's army who had refused to give up a valuable Aragonese captive; for which they had been imprisoned in the Tower of London without trial. Shakell was arrested, while Hanley, having fled into the Abbey itself during High Mass, was killed in the choir, along with a bystander. Excommunications followed, but the monks, fearing a confiscation of church property to pay for the wars, had to accept that rights of sanctuary would be reduced. Hauley was commemorated with a brass figure of a knight; the brass has gone but the inscription remains:

"*Me did trickery, anger, the raging of the multitude and of the soldiery...with swords, in this renowned refuge of piety, while the priest of God read exhortations at the altar. Alas, o woe, in my death I sprinkled the faces of the monks with my own blood; the Choir is my witness for all time. And now this holy place holds me, Robert Haule, because it was here that, wronged, I first felt the death dealing swords*".

More violence was perpetrated during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, when Richard Imworth, warden of the Marshalsea prison, was prised from the shrine of Edward the Confessor, to which he was clinging, and dragged outside the Abbey to his

death. Margaret Woodville, Edward IV's queen, was luckier: she took sanctuary at the Abbey twice during the Wars of the Roses. Her son Edward V was born there.

Another example of monastic entrepreneurship was the Great Fair of St Edward, held in St Margaret's churchyard. During the thirteenth century, this attracted traders from across Europe. Roger, the king's tailor, spent the large sum of £300 there in 1250. That fair declined in time. But a Monday market was opened on Tothill, the high point (although not much of a hill) that is still recalled in Tothill Street; it did not spark much development.

But Westminster was famous for its inns.

Around 1511, Abbot John Islip petitioned Parliament in a legal case that cited the 'great resort' that was had at Westminster during parliamentary sessions and the four law terms that took place each year. It was important, he said, that ale and other comestibles should be properly regulated. The great legal and parliamentary bazaar of Westminster Hall attracted swarms of visitors during the relevant seasons. Clergy and stewards went in and out of the abbey. William Caxton saw that this would be a good place to set up his printing press; rented from the Abbey, it stood beneath the sign of the Red Pale, at what is now the corner of Victoria Street and Great Smith Street. And the visitors – nearly all of them men – had other needs. Entertainment in the form of tennis, archery and bowls; tailoring and barbering; and places to eat, drink and be fleeced.

After the hubbub of Westminster Hall, the ears of those leaving it were assailed by the shouting of cooks. According to a fifteenth century verse called London Lickpenny, they would sell 'good bread, ale and wine,' before spreading a cloth bearing 'ribs of beef both fat and fine' – no use to the protagonist in the poem, however, since he did not have any money. Roasting hearths offered street food – in a literal sense, since they were often set up in the middle of streets, to the annoyance of traffic.

In the thirteenth century, hospitality was provided ad hoc. The murder of Henry Clement, a clerk of the Justiciar of Ireland, provides a glimpse into the conditions that prevailed around 1240. Clement had been staying with Master David, a surgeon, who had a hall house between the Abbey and the Palace. On the night of the murder, there were people asleep in the courtyard, in the hall and in tents outside the gates of the Palace. The crime was committed by a gang of sixteen horsemen, who broke down the door, rushed upstairs and killed Clement, who had earlier made the mistake of boasting that he had in turn killed Richard Marshal, 3rd Earl of Pembroke; the assailants

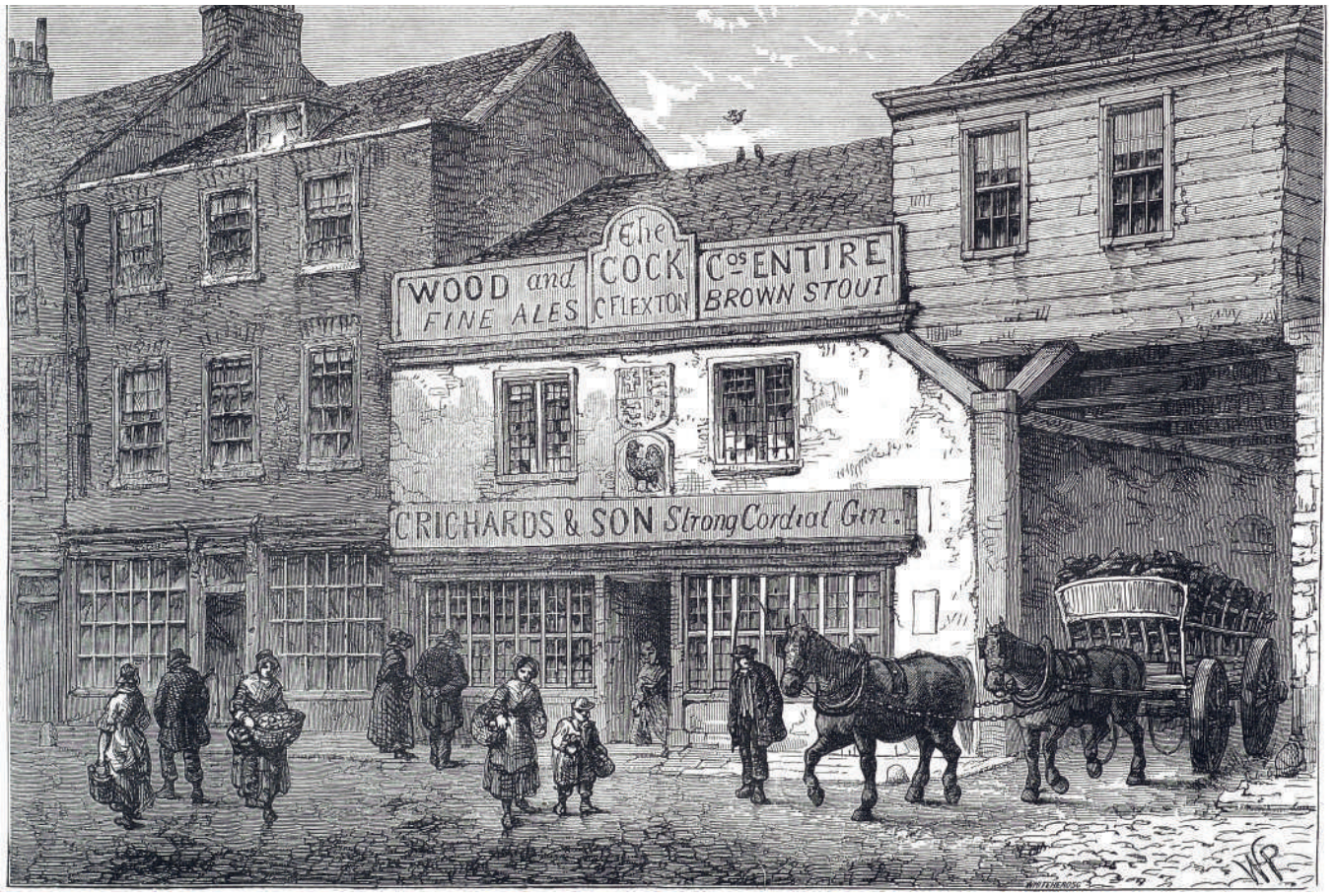

FIG 14
The Cock Tavern in Tothill Street. One of numerous Westminster inns sustained by – and sustaining – the legal business in Westminster Hall and the visitors to Westminster Abbey, it began life as the Cock and Tabard in the fourteenth century. It was demolished in the 1890s.

were probably Marshal supporters. (Their leader, William Marisco, was eventually caught, tried and executed.)

Around 1400, a large number of taverns sprang up. There were also inns offering rooms, along with stabling for horses. But it still paid to be careful. In 1397, Simon Helgey, vicar of Turvey in Bedfordshire, was enticed into the Cock Inn on Tothill Street by its proprietress, Alice atte Hethe, only to be relieved of his outer garments, ring and purse by a couple of armed ruffians, one of whom was the ostler.

Ale wives might also be prostitutes, for whom a considerable market existed among the Westminster population, whether transitory or permanent. They included Jane Paradise, the wife of Purgatory and Margaret of Hell who kept stands on the way to Westminster Hall. However, Elizabeth Waryn, who kept a bordelhouse for monks, priests, and others, in the early fifteenth century, was the wife of a skinner. One of the misericords in Henry VII's chapel in Westminster Abbey shows a mermaid (symbol of female entrapment), another a rich old man paying a young woman for favours (that, anyway, is the interpretation of Paul Hardwick in English Medieval Misericords): the carver did not have to look far beyond the Abbey gates for inspiration. Prostitution was discouraged by the presence of the royal palace, as inappropriate to the dignity of the court, although one courtier of Henry VII succeeded in keeping a brothel within its precincts.

These different forms of economic activity caused a community to grow up around the Palace and Abbey, mostly along the river towards the city and packed into the Abbey precincts. What of the fields between those settlements and the future site of Buckingham Palace? Here was an edge-of-town world that deserves a chapter to itself.

5. On the Toot

Without its west towers, Westminster Abbey rose like a crocketed hulk above the lonely fields to its west. Some of this land was used to grow food for the monks (Abbey Orchard Street marks the site of the Abbot's orchard) but otherwise it was little occupied. There was a leper hospital to the west, dedicated to St James the Less. It is shown in the panorama of London, Westminster and Southwark that Anthony Van der Wyngaerde created in the 1540s; it later became part of St James's Palace. Otherwise, according to Van der Wyngaerde, whose work is the first complete semi-accurate depiction of Westminster to exist, there was little to fill the scene other than sporadic hedges and clumps of bushes, without so much as a sheep to provide life. As yet, no road approaches the Abbey and Palace from inland; only the rich could move with any ease and safety across country, and even for them it was much more convenient to go by boat. Which is why the banks of the Thames are shown as built up, but the hinterland of the Abbey is deserted.

Van der Wyngaerde's drawing should not be taken at face value. True, the area remained rural into the nineteenth century: a print of 1849 shows a bull, escaped from the horse ferry that crossed the Thames at Horseferry Road, jumping the gate into Sir Robert Peel's Westminster garden. But there was activity of a kind on Tothill. As the highest spot in a marshy landscape, it may have been used for a 'toot' or beacon. In, or before, the fifteenth century a chapel dedicated to St Armel was built close to Tothill. The structure itself was demolished in the sixteenth century, but the name continued in corrupted form as St Ermin and survives today through what in 1899 became the six-hundred room St Ermin's Hotel off Caxton Street.

Nearer the Abbey, Tothill Street attracted some noble residents in the sixteenth and

FIG 15
A nineteenth century engraving of Van der Wyngaerde's Panorama of London (c1543-50). The hulk-like volume of Westminster Abbey can be seen on the left, rising above the Palace of Westminster. The fields behind, part of the Abbey's ancient endowment, are largely undeveloped.

Fig 16
An engraving showing Wenceslaus Hollar's 1660 perspective of St James's Palace and the City of Westminster.

seventeenth centuries; John Milton lived in Petty France, named after the French merchants who stayed in the street while trading in wool (there was also Petty Calais, now gone.) Later, the social reformer Jeremy Bentham put up a tablet inscribed 'Sacred to Milton, Prince of Poets.'

The priest and royal councillor, John Mansel, appears to have had a house on Tothill Fields. It must have been a large mansion because in 1256, according to the Elizabethan antiquarian John Stow in his Survey of London, he threw open its doors to 'the kings and queens of England and Scotland, with diverse courtiers and citizens, and whereof there was such a multitude that seven hundred messes of meat did not serve for the first dinner.' All trace of this mansion has now disappeared, and it is not known what it looked like. Tothill Fields would also host tournaments and jousts, trials by combat and duels. The London trained bands, or militia, paraded here, an artillery ground inspired the name of Artillery Row, and there were archery butts. The herbalist Nicholas Culpeper writes of 'place' or parsley that, 'It is a common herb throughout the nation, and rejoiceth in barren, sandy, moist places,' among them being Tothill Fields.

For all that, it was no man's land. As Jeremy Bentham put it, 'If a place could exist of which it could be said that it was in no neighbourhood, that place would be Tothill Fields.' So near to London, it was inevitable that this unloved area of open ground – urban fringe as it would now be called – was put to some unwholesome uses. They included pest houses and burial pits for the

Great Plague of 1665. On July 18 of that year, Samuel Pepys was 'much troubled this day to hear at Westminster how the officers do bury the dead in the open Tuttle Fields, pretending want of room elsewhere.' This was not the first time that mass burials had taken place. In the previous decade, Scottish prisoners who had been taken at the Battle of Worcester and died of wounds or disease were flung into communal graves here; those that lived, according to Heath's Chronicle, being driven 'through Westminster to Tuthill Fields,' where they were sold to slave merchants for the West Indies. The pest houses, though, were a charitable endeavour, having been built by Lord Craven, otherwise famous as an admirer of the Queen of Bohemia, for whom he built Ashdown House, on the Berkshire Downs; during the Great Plague he fearlessly took sufferers into his own home. Located near what would become the line of Vauxhall Bridge Road, they were later converted to almshouses. In 1618, the site of the Monday market on Tothill Fields, which once a year blossomed into St Magdalen's Fair, became a Bridewell (named after Bridewell Palace, an important London prison) or House of Correction. This was a place where the able-bodied poor were put to work. Two hundred years later, Millbank – named after the Abbot of Westminster's mill – would provide the site for a large prison. The Bridewell would in time be replaced by Westminster Cathedral, the prison by the Tate Gallery (Tate Britain).

And yet Tothills and its neighbour Pimlico were also resorts of pleasure. We have seen how medieval Westminster provided hospitality to the lawyers, suitors and clergy frequenting the Palace and Abbey. In the seventeenth century, a brewhouse was established next to a stream that led into the ornamental pond of St James's Park, besides which cows were put out to pasture. Over time, this developed into the immense Stag Brewery, one of London's major producers of porter and a variety of ales. Malting, mashing, fermenting, the making of barrels and the hauling of them on carts drawn by heavy horses were among the trades of Victoria, well into the twentieth century.

As the incident at the Cock Inn suggests, Westminster's taverns did not just cater to locals and passing trade; people in search of a good time sought them out. There had been a maze on Tothill Fields since at least the seventeenth century; characteristically, it is mentioned in John Cooke's Greene's Tu Quoque; or the Cittie Gallant; a Play of Much Humour of 1614 as the meeting place for a duel. It was, according to John Aubrey, writing later in the century, 'much frequented in summer-time in fair afternoons.' Fine summer afternoons

require refreshment, which was served.

Pimlico's very name had a beery ring. The first documented use being in 1626, it was probably adopted in imitation of another Pimlico in Hoxton which was also famous for its pubs and bawdy pleasures – though why Hoxton should have had somewhere as Continental-sounding as Pimlico remains unclear. We can, however, determine why the area around the current Pimlico Road was in the mid-eighteenth century known as Rumbillo. Although this may sound Italian, the now forgotten term was an effort to conjoin Rumbelowes' field with the nearby Strombolo House.

Around 1700, Pimlico grew the trees for the avenues needed in William III's new palace at Kensington: this was where the royal gardener had his nursery. There were also market gardens. By the end of the century, they were not merely productive but decoratively laid out, in pretty geometrical patterns, as can be seen from Richard Horwood's Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster the Borough of Southwark, and parts adjoining, published in the 1790s. A public used to the Thames-side amusements provided by Vauxhall and Ranelagh Gardens came here to stroll and drink tea; the plots were known as the Neat House Gardens – 'neat' from an old word meaning cattle.

Road communications were still primitive. There was no bridge other than London Bridge until the opening of Westminster Bridge in 1750, followed by Regent Bridge (later known as Vauxhall Bridge) in 1816. In the seventeenth century, Rochester Row and the Willow Walk causeway (now Warwick Way) were constructed to form the first footpath connecting Westminster with the village of Chelsea. But the Willow Walk was crossed at one's peril. When the Rev. William Stone addressed a Parliamentary Commission into Improving the Metropolis in 1844, he described the neighbourhood of Willow Walk as 'inhabited more by an infamous population;' it was 'physically and morally one of the most wretched places about us.' The age of new roads was dawning: Victoria Street would soon be under construction.

Until then it was not a road which shaped the destiny of this part of London, but a canal – and another palace.

6. Rubbing Shoulders with Royalty

Georgian England hated disorder, and gradually the Rule of Taste reached even Tothill Fields. The process can be followed on John Roque's map of London, published in 1746. It shows that development has spread out from the immediate precincts of the Abbey. The right of sanctuary had been abolished in 1623, to the betterment of the tone of the neighbourhood; and development in Westminster had been stimulated by the Great Fire of London in 1666. The Fire had dispossessed many families, and for decades afterwards, much of the City was a building site. So handsome terraces of red brick, with sash windows and hoods over the front doors, colonised the fringe of St James's Park; the proximity of green space was already an attraction in a city whose air, as John Evelyn had complained in Fumifugitum of 1661, was choked with smoke from sea coal (it arrived by sea from Newcastle upon Tyne). For example, at the end of the century, what is

Fig 17
Statue of Queen Anne at Queen Anne's Gate, c1705.

now Queen Anne's Gate – originally two streets, separated by a wall – was formed, partly by Christ's Hospital and partly on land that had previously been occupied by an inn, the White Hart. The western half was originally a little square, graced by a statue of Queen Anne. This was followed by Smith Square, with its own parish church – likened by Dickens to 'some petrified monster, frightful and gigantic, on its back with its legs in the air' – by Thomas Archer, built in 1714-28.

Free schools were formed for the poor; The Blew Coat School and the Grey Coat Hospital, as well as the now disappeared Green Coat School are both shown on Rocque's map. as are alms houses on Rochester Row. The map also marks Peterborough House, built by the 1st Earl of Peterborough in the seventeenth century, standing on the river. Tothill Fields are not the wilderness of old. Quite a lot of the previous open space has been divided up into little fields, surrounded by hedges. A stubby canal has snaked its way in – more of that in the next chapter. To the north, avenues radiate from Buckingham House.

Fig 18
Part of John Rocque's Map of London, 1746. Tothill Fields can be seen bottom left, with the Grosvenor Canal (the basin was the future site of Victoria Station) beside them. Smith Square, with the church of St John, are to the right; while the many avenues of St James's Park point to Buckingham House.


B
C
D
E
THE
RIVER
LONDON
SOUTH
WESTMINSTER,
WARK;
BUILDINGS

The Blew Coat School

With the development of Westminster in the late seventeenth century came schools for the poor. The Blew Coat School was established around 1688 to counter the efforts of the Jesuits, active under James II, who had established schools in the Savoy and elsewhere. Its object, according to a parchment of around 1700, was to educate 'fifty poor boys…[who] were and still are carefully taught to read, write, cast accompts, and also catechised and instructed in the Principles of our most Holy Religion, and put out when fit to trades whereby they might act honest livelyhoods in the World.' Around 1713, a number of girls were also admitted. The school opened in hired buildings in Duck Lane; in 1709, however, it was able to construct its own building - a fine piece of brick

Fig 19
The Blew Coat School.

architecture, articulated with pilasters, with a statue of a Blew Coat boy over the entrance. Inside, a vestibule with Corinthian columns gave into the school room, forty-two feet by thirty. This space was panelled and lit by tall windows.

The Grey Coat Hospital was founded in 1698, so that the children of the poor would become 'loyal citizens, useful workers and solid Christians'. Their school building was erected on the site of the Elizabethan workhouse in Tothill Fields, and continue in their original use, supplemented by another that opened on nearby Regency Street in 1998. Originally children boarded but, as the school website disarmingly observes: 'After a colourful history which included a murder in 1773 and a rebellion in protest against the dreadful conditions of the school in 1801, the school became a day school of girls in 1874.'

There was also a Green Coat School, otherwise known as St Margaret's Hospital, endowed by Charles II and the Duchess of Somerset (the Duchess of Somerset's children wore yellow caps). Portraits by Lely and Van Dyck hung in the refectory. The buildings were demolished to make way for the Army and Navy Stores.

Fig 20
A Grey Coat Girl; a figure from the facade of the former Grey Coat Hospital (1698-1955), now Grey Coat Hospital School.

Buckingham House had been built for the First Duke of Buckingham and Normandy in 1702-05. In Vitruvius Britannicus, Colen Campbell states that this house was 'conducted by the learned and ingenious Capt.Wynne' – a reference to William Winde, a military architect who did not get preferment and, after the Glorious Revolution, devoted himself to the building of mansions. Well might he have been called learned and ingenious: a friend of Samuel Pepys, he was elected to the Royal Society in 1662 – although he was expelled in 1685, not having paid his subscription (a sign that money was tight). He wrote an unpublished book on mathematics. Campbell's use of the word 'conducted' suggests that Winde may not have designed Buckingham House, but overseen the building works. If he did design it, however, he was a significant influence on the architecture of the coming decades, because the formula of a central block of rectangular profile, with parapet and pilasters, linked to flanking pavilions by quadrant colonnades was much copied. Clearly the eye of fashion was now on St James's.

But an even greater future awaited this site. In 1763, it was bought from the Duke of Buckingham's heir, his illegitimate son Sir Charles Sheffield, by none other than the King. George III was twenty-five, his wife, Queen Charlotte, a few years younger. That summer, after celebrating the King's birthday at St James's Palace, the Queen threw a surprise party at what would become Buckingham Palace – throwing open the shutters to reveal gardens lit by four thousand glass lamps. For once, Robert Adam had been preferred to the King's architectural tutor, Sir William Chambers, and he had designed a colonnade, lit from behind to reveal a tableau depicting a reign of peace. The young King gave the house to his young Queen, and twelve of her fifteen children were born in it.

Chambers was made responsible for remodelling the house. Although George III was the monarch, his tastes were famously domestic. The house had to be made suitable for family life. It would also contain his library. As well as reworking the main façade, adding north and south wings, and updating the interiors, Chambers provided four libraries: the Great or West Library, the South Library, the Octagon Library and the East Library. Dr Johnson was among those who read the books there. The King, wanting to meet him, once approached his chair in silence, surprising the Doctor. Although Johnson was a confirmed Tory, he was charmed by George III's love of books [1].

By the time George IV became King in 1820, he professed to be too old for architectural projects; he had already spent a fortune on Brighton Pavilion and Carlton House. But, he said,

[1]History of The King's Works, Vol. V, pp.134-7

FIG 21
Buckingham Palace engraved by J.Woods after a picture by Hablot Browne & R.Garland 1837. This shows the palace as built for George IV with Marble Arch as the front gate.

if the British people really wanted him to build a palace… His favourite architect John Nash was commissioned to make one out of the Queen's House. The result was not happy. George IV was one of the few British monarchs to have a genuine passion for the visual arts, his appetite – in this as other respects – was insatiable. Nash was too old and too much a friend of the king to be firm with him. The project became notorious for incompetence and waste. It is Nash that visitors to Buckingham Palace have to thank for the monumental, unexciting State rooms, awash with red and gold. But the courtyard that he created, facing St James's Park, with no fewer than three giant porticos as well as a triumphal arch, is no longer visible from outside the palace: Queen Victoria commissioned Edward Blore to block it off from view by building a range across the mouth of the courtyard.

"...if the British people really wanted him to build a palace..."

The presence of the royal family encouraged a clutch of new streets to spring up. These formed a block, next to what would become Buckingham Gate: they were given loyal names like Catherine Place. One of them, Stafford Row, has an older derivation, taken from a nearby house called Tart Hall, built in 1638 and occupied by William, Viscount Stafford (beheaded in 1680, after being falsely accused of treachery by Titus Oates). Stafford Row was surprisingly popular with actors, one of them being Richard Yates who, in 1796, supposedly died of rage when his housekeeper could not procure a favourite dish of eels. Most of these houses were swept away when the area was rebuilt in the nineteenth century to provide offices for the Duchy of Cornwall and such buildings as the Buckingham Palace Hotel, now part of the 1 Palace Street development. The Swedish industrialist Alfred Nobel, inventor of dynamite, bought the Buckingham Palace Hotel as his London headquarters.

Blore's front to Buckingham Palace was an insipid affair. Eventually it would be refaced, as part of a project to honour the memory of Queen Victoria, not completed until 1913.

The Queen Victoria Memorial Scheme began with the limited competition to design a memorial to the late Queen-Empress outside Buckingham Palace, initiated immediately after her death in 1901. It was won by Aston Webb in conjunction with the sculptor Thomas Brock. The centrepiece of Webb's scheme was a statue of the Queen Empress, sitting in front of a white marble pylon topped by a gilded bronze figure of Victory. The other three sides of the pylon support figures

Fig 22
Innauguration
of the Victoria
Memorial.

of Truth, Justice and Charity, while ships prows project to form the pedestal: a reminder that Britannia ruled the seas. Figures holding lions stand at the corners of the composition. The whole of the Mall was taken into the project, being landscaped to lead up to the Memorial and the palace beyond it; the road surface is made of pink Tarmac as though it were an enormous red carpet unrolled in front of Buckingham Palace.

By the time the Memorial had been completed in 1911, the immediate surroundings had been turned into what Webb – influenced by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris – called a ronde point, otherwise roundabout: perhaps the first in Britain (roundabouts were not introduced more generally until 1923), it was an acknowledgement that the

motor age had arrived. (In recent decades, hurrying motorists would scatter the tourists who attempted to scurry across the road to the steps of the Memorial like chickens; the ronde point has now been replaced by a pedestrian scheme.) In 1906 it was decided to address the awkward relationship between the Mall and Trafalgar Square (there was no direct route between them). Webb's solution was Admiralty Arch: a triumphal arch with curving sides which would disguise the change of direction between the Mall and the Strand. With typical parsimony, the Treasury insisted that offices and accommodation were built over the arch, thereby combining a grand urban statement with utility: not a consideration which would have held sway in Paris.

Enough money was left over from the Queen Victoria Memorial to allow the refacing of Buckingham Palace. The work was achieved in just three months. Webb's scheme included the gates in front of the palace made by the Bromsgrove Guild, with elaborate Arts and Crafts locks. It is on these locks that an expectant public has looked for notices of the royal family's health. Another feature of the scheme that would enter national life is the balcony on the first floor; it was a particular requirement of George V that it should not be obscured, allowing the royal family to show itself to the crowd. As a result, Webb had it carried forward on brackets. It is on the balcony that successive monarchs and their families have appeared at moments of national emotion: coronations, weddings, births, jubilees, funerals and the conclusion of wars.

But it looks away from Victoria. The Memorial that honours Queen Victoria turns its back on the area that bears her name.

St James's Park

St James's Park is the oldest Royal Park. It was Henry VIII who, in 1536, acquired the marshy land, often flooded by the river Tyburn, for a deer park; the future St James's Palace grew out of a hunting lodge. James I improved the drainage and turned the remaining ponds into duck decoys to lure birds for the royal table. King James also began the tradition of keeping exotic animals and birds in the park, including camels, crocodiles and an elephant. The aviaries gave their name to Birdcage Walk.

At the Restoration, Charles II ordered that the park should be landscaped by the French gardener, Andre Mollet. The King and his brother, the future James II, could often be seen playing there, surrounded by their dogs. The King also built a monastery for the use of the monks who attended his Portuguese Queen Catherine of Braganza. There was also a Milk Fair, selling, among other things, asses' milk for the complexion; so-called milk fools would advertise their wares with the cry 'A can of milk, ladies! A can of red cow's milk, sir!' A female dwarf was exhibited here under the unkind name of the Corsican Fairy in 1748.

In the 1820s, St James's Park was landscaped as part of the scheme to create Regent Street – which was supposed to lead to Carlton House, only by the time the Prince (now King) had transferred his attention to Buckingham House, now Buckingham Palace, Carlton House was demolished. Charles II's canal became a curving lake. Since then it has remained largely unchanged, except for the Blue Bridge across the lake: the concrete one of today, built in 1957, is the successor to a suspension bridge built in 1857.

Fig 23
Western view of St James's Park with Buckingham Palace in the background, May 2016.

7. Victoria Station

The so-called Grosvenor Canal was not really a canal – more of an artificial creek, built by the Chelsea Waterworks Company in the 1720s; in the eighteenth century, it was still possible to take drinking water in reasonable safety from the Thames. This waterway was only a mile long. The inlet from the Thames can still be seen near Chelsea Bridge.

Short though it was, the Grosvenor Canal was a decisive factor in the development of Pimlico and Victoria. To Thomas Cubitt, the great builder, master planner and entrepreneur, it provided a wharf onto which hundreds of barges could unload their cargo of rubble. The rubble was a prerequisite of development. Low-lying and marshy, Pimlico's ground level had to be built up before Cubitt could build on it. Some of it came from St Katharine's Dock, on the other side of the City of London, which was being dug out at the time.

Even before work had begun, Cubitt's achievement had been impressive. It involved buying or leasing land that had been in a number of ownerships. Onto this he projected an approximate grid, somewhat skewed to take into account existing thoroughfares such as Warwick Way (on the route of the Willow Walk), with one broad curving street that follows the line of the noisome King's Scholars Pond Sewer – a watercourse, ripe from the effluent it had collected in the course of its journey through the West End, which had to be roofed over. Begun in the mid 1820s, Pimlico became a scene of scaffolding poles and hoardings, the latter erected along the sides of streets that ran above vaults to store coal (the basements of Pimlico houses are actually at ground level). As many as eighty heavy horses hauled cartloads of timber, railings, stone from Cubitt's great yard on Thames Bank, where Dolphin Square now stands; it became one of the

Fig 24
A typical street
in Pimlico.

sights of London. By the time work was finished 40 years later, Belgravia had been given a sister – dressed in the same white stucco, but of smaller stature and less aspiration.

A newspaper article of 1877 put a soft filter on its lens. 'This,' it simpered, 'is the abode of gentility – a servant or two in the kitchen, birds in the windows, with flowers in boxes, pianos, and the latest fashions, of course. People here are always dressed in their best, and though not the cream of the cream, can show on occasion broughams and pairs, opera cloaks of surpassing gorgeousness and dress suits that would satisfy Poole or Worth. Where people do not live on their property they are artists – they teach the piano, singing, dancing, drawing, languages, or are in the City....' The author was not entirely wrong. Artists have at different times lived in Pimlico: the poet Aubrey Beardsley in Eccleston Square, Arthur Sullivan in Lupus Street and Miss Blanche Reives, late Reeves (soprano), advertised her services for oratorios, concerts and soirées from Tachbrook Street. In Vanity Fair, published in 1848, Thackeray thought it promised sufficiently well to imagine a 'fashionable' character called John Pimlico marrying Lady Belgravia Green Parker. But a more worldly, and truer, note is sounded by Trollope in The Small House at Allington. 'For heaven's sake, my dear,' a friend admonishes the soon-to-be-married Lady Amelia de Courcy, about to go house-hunting with her intended, 'don't let him take you anywhere beyond Eccleston Square!'

The truth was that by the time Pimlico's last streets were built out in the 1850s, taste had moved on; Georgian terraces and no doubt Cubitt terraces were despised as monotonous, in the age of the Gothic Revival; and the railways were making it possible to live in suburbs that lay beyond London's smoke and smog. Although the squares retained their cachet, houses in the smaller streets were often let out by the floor – a mark of social disaster.

The railway – it came just as Pimlico was finishing. Cubitt died in 1855; Victoria station opened in 1860. In one way, however, Pimlico was fortunate. Usually, Victorian railway lines arrived with the brutality of a 'great earthquake', as Dickens described in Dombey and Son, having witnessed the destruction caused by the building of the London and Birmingham line to Euston in the 1830s. But Pimlico had the Grosvenor Canal. Sir Samuel Moreton Peto, engineer and railway promoter, explained the benefits of using it, suitably filled in, for the tracks, and building a terminus over the canal basin: 'you avoid any large viaduct across an expensive building property,'[2] he told a Select Committee of Parliament in 1858, '…the wide thoroughfares are not likely to be

[2]John R.Kellett, The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities, pp.274

Fig 25
Victoria Station, as shown by the Illustrated London News in 1861. It was originally two stations – one for the Brighton line (1860), the other for the London, Chatham and Dover (1862) – built next door to each other in contrasting styles and materials.

surcharged with traffic – and long platforms will be possible.' The Marquis of Westminster agreed. Shrubs were planted, goods trains banned, the part of the line approaching the station roofed over – but even with these measures, designed to minimise the railway's impact on neighbours, the cost of the works was estimated at £675,000; this was regarded as cheap. The station was originally called the Grosvenor Terminus, but Victoria Station proved more popular; it was at the end of the newly built Victoria Street.

It was originally two stations – one for the Brighton line (1860), the other for the London, Chatham and Dover (1862) – built next door to each other in contrasting styles and materials. Together, it formed the largest of the London stations to date. Inhabitants of the West End were now connected to the rest of the country – indeed, to the Continent – through the railway network. The impatient among them – it was an impatient age – may have thought it had been a long wait: the first London station, London Bridge, opened in 1836. But they were not the last in the queue. Among the others still to come were St Pancras

FIG 26
The Baroque facade to the entrance for the Chatham and Dover Lines at Victoria Station.

(1866), Liverpool Street (1875) and Marylebone (1899). On May 4, 1861, The Illustrated London News showed its readers what the new Victoria Station looked like; passengers debouche from hansom cabs onto a roadway between the tracks, while little steam engines puff smoke into the upper reaches of the superstructure. The London, Brighton and South Coast's station followed the example of Waterloo, with a superstructure composed of transverse ribs. The engineer provided the London, Chatham and Dover Railway Company with two arches of wrought iron construction, carried on eight cast iron columns; the shed follows the line of the platforms in the manner of Paddington or St Pancras – a more elegant solution.

One of the new 'monster' railway hotels – the Grosvenor, inevitably – was built along the Buckingham Palace Road frontage, in an Italianate style; the London Brighton and South Coast Railway bought it in 1899, building a large brick extension with a clock in a scroll, in the manner of a hôtel de ville. Ten years later, the London Chatham and Dover built a new Edwardian Baroque entrance to Terminus Place – out of stone. The rivalry was extinguished in 1923, when the two stations were merged into one. The effect has never been entirely satisfactory. While many of the other great London termini – St Pancras, King's Cross, Liverpool Street, Paddington—have been revived in recent years, Victoria continues to languish. There are 81 million entrances and exits each year to Victoria Station, making it the second busiest London station after Waterloo, yet, alas, satisfaction levels are low.

At the time of writing, both new entrances to Victoria Underground Station have been opened – the harbinger of a completely renovated tube station, due to open shortly. The new tube station will complement the Herculean building works that have taken place along Victoria Street and around Bressenden Place. How much longer must passengers wait until the eponymous station catches up with the rest of Victoria?

Victoria Station at War

Victoria Railway Station in London is a hybrid of a terminus which, during the First World War, was still two stations – one for the Brighton line, the other for the London, Chatham and Dover. Its concourse was invariably crowded with servicemen in khaki great coats, knapsacks and rifles on their backs, being the capital's first and last point of contact with thousands of servicemen, including the returning wounded – so many that from February 1916, women from the Green Cross Corps (Women's Reserve Ambulance) were detailed to help those who were lost or needed accommodation. This was the very scene that Richard Jack, Canada's first official war artist, was

Fig 27
Richard Jack, Return to the Front, Victoria Railway Station 1916.

to depict the next year in his epic canvas Return to the Front.

Church groups had set up kitchens to offer food and hot drinks (the vicar of St Peter's Eaton Square turned his chapel of ease in Wilton Road into a hospital, devoting the whole of St Peter's ample endowment to running it.) By the end of 1915, the ladies of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Free Buffet were, according to The Graphic:

'Cutting bread, buttering it, spreading it thickly with minced ham, beef or potted meat; cutting cake into generous chunks, and filling the clean enamelled dishes, both for use at the buffet counter and on the platform... while a ceaseless stream of Tommies or Jacks on travel bent passes through, demanding refreshment.'

Well-wishers pressed chocolate and cigarettes on the returning troops, uniforms still caked with mud. Mugs of tea were handed out. The porters who collected the tickets were now women, the men who had previously done those jobs having signed up.

It was to Victoria Station that the body of the Unknown Warrior was brought on November 10 1920, in a carriage already remarkable for having carried the body of Nurse Edith Cavell, shot by the Germans. Next morning an honour guard took it to Westminster Abbey.

Fig 28
The Uknown Warrior at Westminter Abbey, November 1920.

In order to commemorate the many soldiers with no known grave, it was decided to bury an 'Unknown Warrior' with all due ceremony in Westminster Abbey on Armistice Day in 1920. This image is a view of the coffin of the Unknown Warrior .

8. Victoria Street

The grace and elegance of the Grosvenor Estate's fashionable new residences in Belgravia and of Cubitt's cheaper, but still orderly development going up in Pimlico threw into starker contrast the dilapidated nature of Westminster.

Its streets were in a poor state of repair, its sagging and bulging houses over-crowded, not least with thieves and prostitutes. In 1850, Charles Dickens called the area around Old Pye Street the Devil's Acre. The same year, Cardinal Wiseman, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, joined him in lamenting the human misery that could be found there:

'*Close under the Abbey of Westminster there lie concealed labyrinths of lanes and courts, and alleys and slums, nests of ignorance, vice, depravity, and crime, as well as of squalor, wretchedness, and disease; whose atmosphere is typhus, whose ventilation is cholera; in which swarms a huge and almost countless population, nominally at least,*

FIG 29
Devil's Acre, from Dore's London 1872.

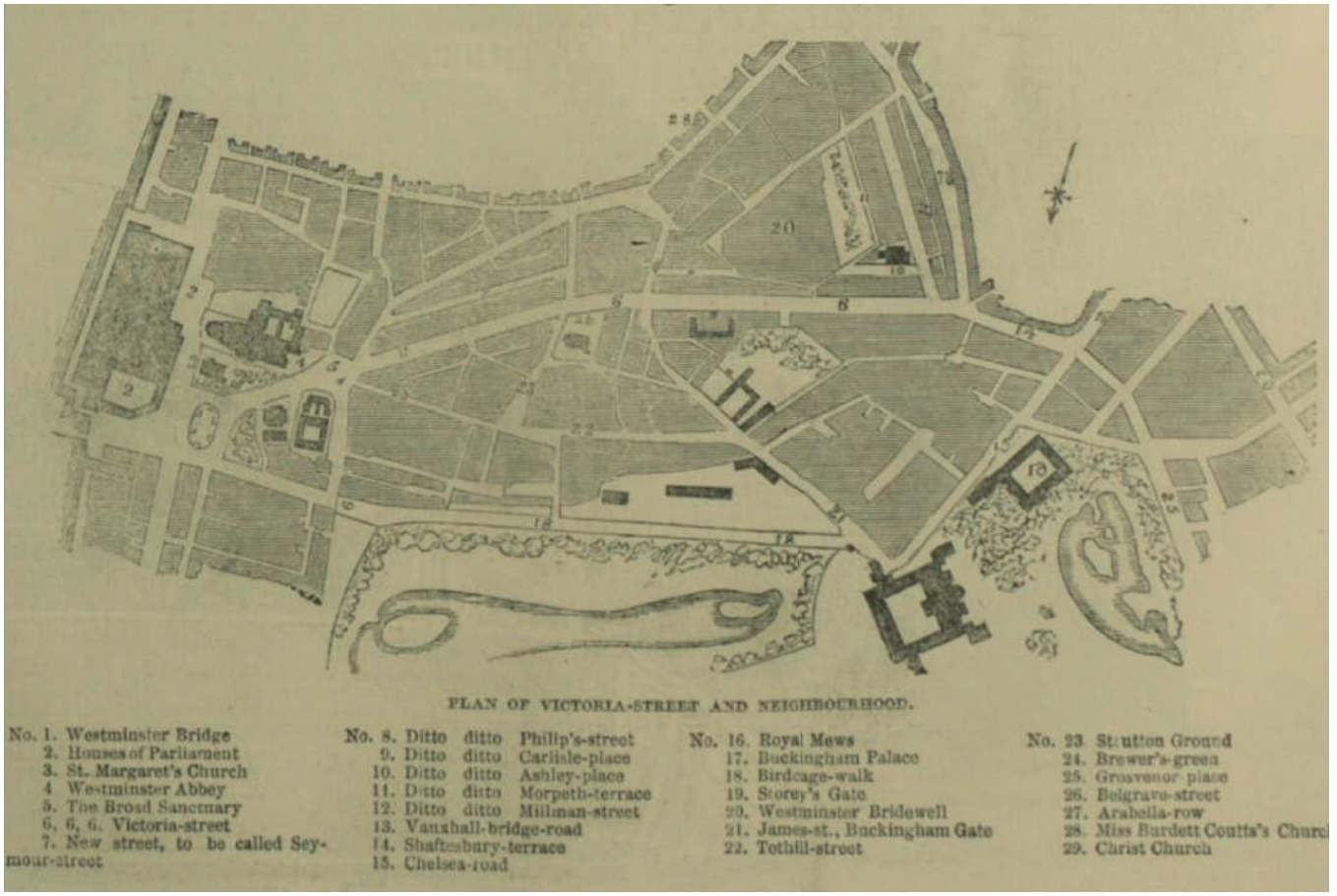

FIG 30
Plan of Victoria Street when it opened in 1851. The street was much praised by the Illustrated London News for demolishing some notorious slums; however, the planners missed the opportunity to provide a worthy square to showcase the west front of Westminster Abbey.

Catholic; haunts of filth, which no sewage committee can reach – dark corners, which no lighting board can brighten.'

Reaching the dark corners meant one thing above all: Improvement.

Improvement was on its way. Two Westminster Improvements Acts had been passed in 1845 and 1847; they promised a new street that would scythe through the nettles and brambles of the urban jungle and allow light to flood the forest floor.

When Victoria Street was opened in August 1851, The Illustrated London News concluded that it was the most important new thoroughfare in London since Regent Street, many years earlier. It not only rendered 'a thorough improvement of the worst part of Westminster,' but opened a new way from Belgravia to Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. It disclosed a number of notable buildings, previously hidden, to public view – such as Elliot's brewery; the Bridewell, whose 'exterior will become as well-known a London exterior as Newgate or the [Millbank] Penitentiary; and various churches and charitable works'. Some three or four thousand houses were cleared away, and proper drainage – much needed in this low-lying area – was laid. Clean water was provided. 'Another important point which has attracted the attention of the Commissioners,' according to The Illustrated London News, was 'the duty of

Fig 31
Morpeth Terrace, Victorian terraces on the 'Parisian' apartment block model.

providing better houses for the working classes, who have necessarily been removed from their former abodes by the recent improvements… The accommodation proposed to be afforded for the rent of 4s. a week is two good rooms, a water-closet, and a scullery for each family.' Three rooms could be had for 5s. a week, four for 6s.

Victoria Street was not only built for the working classes, however. Its proximity to Parliament and government departments naturally made it an ideal location for anybody with a professional or commercial interest in being close to the country's decision-makers. The offices of railway companies seeking to petition for new lines to be cut through town and country, of engineering companies and of inventors keen to be close to the patent office, indeed, all those seeking to lobby legislators for commercial gain were among the first generation of businesses taking out tenancies along the new street. The construction of 'gentlemen's chambers' and multi-occupancy office buildings aimed to cater for them.

Victoria also, rather daringly, offered flats on the 'Scotch' or Parisian model, of apartment blocks with shared front doors. Taking 'rooms' had previously been for commercial travellers and those of limited means who were very much seen as such. Where grander buildings were subdivided into smaller apartments signified declining value and a neighbourhood on the slide. Yet, what was built in the 1850s and 1860s along Victoria Street, Carlisle Place, Morpeth Terrace and Grosvenor Gardens was an effort to revolutionise the way middle class Londoners thought about status and property, for here were 'mansion blocks' and 'chambers' purpose-built as apartments aimed at prosperous occupants. The idea was slow to take off, but once it did it spawned imitators, revolutionising housing in the metropolis and the social composition that went with it.

Early on, Prince Albert visited some by Commissioners' architect, Henry Ashton, built in an Italianate style, and 'was pleased to express his approbation of them architecturally, as well as being a great improvement upon the lodging-houses generally of London'.

Initially it was not intended that Victoria Street would become an avenue of shops. However, the opening of the Army and Navy Stores in 1872 changed its complexion.

This department store evolved out of the Army and Navy Co-operative Society, founded in 1871 for the benefit of military and naval officers and their families. Originally the idea had been to provide cases of wine at wholesale prices, but this was soon extended to anything that might be needed by military and naval families at home or abroad. It was to the Army and Navy that

FIG 32
An engraving of the Army and Navy Co-operative Store in London, 1872.

the future newspaper editor Bill Deedes went in the 1830s, to prepare himself to report on the Abyssinian crisis; he bought solar topi, camp bed, metal uniform cases, cedarwood trunk, emergency rations and a tropical medicine cabinet (he was the model for William Boot in Evelyn Waugh's Scoop). Branches of the Army and Navy were opened across India – in Karachi, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Simla and Ranchi.

Because Victoria Street contained so few premises designed to serve as shops, the Army and Navy established itself into a vast distillery building whose exterior vaguely resembled that of a scaled-down St Pancras Station. (The present building dates from 1977, the year after the Army and Navy was acquired by House of Fraser.) Nevertheless, despite the Army and Navy's success and the creation of a cluster of shops near Victoria Station, it would be the best part of another fifty years before Victoria Street could really be said to be lined with retail emporia. Instead, the street's mid-nineteenth century developers focussed upon attracting two sorts of tenants – offices and residents.

FIG 33
Army and Navy Co-operative Society Ltd Price List, 1908.

9. Westminster Cathedral

Westminster Cathedral is one of the most extraordinary buildings in Britain. A tower of immense height rises above a basilica of complex and beautifully laid brickwork, with arches meeting each other at angles and facades rippling with geometrically placed ribs. The orangey-rose brick from Berkshire is striped with bands of pale Portland stone, further breaking down the scale of this great structure. For the Cathedral is both immense and delicate, solemn and festive – and certainly, in its style, foreign. The perfume of the East rises above Victoria Street, and does so behind a piazza (created in 1975) that shows this architectural wonder off to the full; it provides a setting much better than that afforded to the West Front of Westminster Abbey a few hundred yards away.

The cathedral has its origins in 1850, when Pope Pius IX recreated the Roman Catholic hierarchy of bishops, which had died with the last Catholic bishop. But the new Archbishops of Westminster initially had to make do with a pro-Cathedral, first at Moorfields and later at Kensington, while funds were somewhat ponderously raised. Cardinal Manning had more urgent priorities, and put his energies first and foremost into the provision of schools and orphanages for the poor among whom he had worked in Bayswater and Notting Hill. 'First I must gather in the poor children,' was how he put it. However, during the 1860s a site was bought: it was hardly very suitable, being a long, thin sliver of land beside Carlisle Place. Henry Clutton, a Catholic convert, designed a Gothic cathedral for the space: it would have no more than seventy feet wide for its length. There was no room for transepts. The Archbishop would have had his House at one end. This site was improved by further purchases, and Clutton prepared more designs. The recently erected Guards' Institute, a

Fig 34
Westminster Cathedral, completed in 1903 to designs by John Francis Bentley.

failed club intended for soldiers in the Brigade of Guards, was bought as the Archbishop's House. Grander plans were commissioned from Clutton for a building that was now four hundred and fifty feet in length and a hundred and forty feet across, in the early Gothic style. It would have been bigger than Westminster Abbey.

The ambition was too much for some potential donors, who hung back; and Sir Tatton Sykes, who financed the building and restoration of many churches on his Yorkshire estate, did not finally convert to Catholicism (he had offered to pay for a major church on doing so). By 1883, however, the site's purchase cost had been paid off, and Manning was beginning to dream of a fine cathedral arising. It was then that an alternative site became available with the sale of what had been the Tothill Fields Bridewell, or House of Correction for indigent paupers, which had since 1826 been the Middlesex Country Prison. A company was formed to buy it; the old cathedral site was sold off. There remained, however, a debt. Fortunately, on Cardinal Manning's death in 1892, the new Archbishop, Herbert Cardinal Vaughan, was a man of immense vim. As Bentley's daughter Winefride de l'Hôpital records in her early history of the cathedral, published in 1919, 'he plunged almost immediately, and with characteristic vehemence, into the labour of cathedral

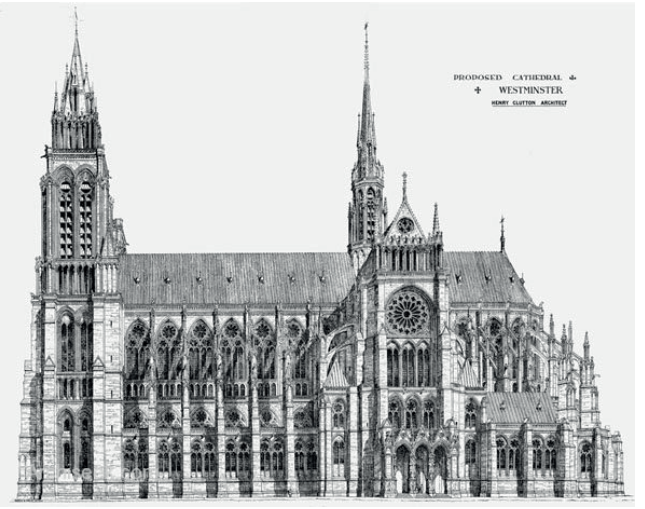

FIG 35
Henry Clutton's proposed Cathedral at Westminster, 1875.

"For the Cathedral is both immense and delicate, solemn and festive..."

building…Besides the site, fine in position and size, though unfortunately encumbered with a mortgage of £20,000…Cardinal Vaughan's chief assets were unbounded energy and faith, added to a marvellous capacity for enthusing others, and a supreme confidence, under Providence, in the generosity of the Catholic body.'

Taking wide advice, Vaughan decided the man to design his new cathedral would be John Francis Bentley. Bentley, in his mid-fifties, had worked with Clutton, but had since become an independent architect, largely of churches, although, being a Catholic, his output was limited (according to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, only five churches apart from Westminster Cathedral were erected to his designs). Fortunately, the competition that had been proposed at one point was never staged: Bentley detested competitions and would not have entered. The Cardinal's requirement was for a large open church, in which everyone would have a view of the high altar; the structure would have to be built quickly and cheaply, allowing that decoration could be added later. He imagined an early Christian basilica; Bentley persuaded him to accept the Byzantine style. There would be none of the stylistic rivalry with Westminster Abbey that might have pertained had a Gothic style been chosen. Besides, the internationalism of the Byzantine style suited London, a world-metropolis on a par with Constantinople, which had in turn succeeded Rome.

Bentley prepared for his task by travelling. Despite weak health, he visited Milan (for the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio), Pisa, Florence, Rome, Naples, Assisi, Perugia, Ravenna, Venice, Verona and Turin. An outbreak of cholera prevented him visiting Constantinople, but he was able to study Hagia Sofia in the book on it that W.R.Lethaby and Harold Swainson published in 1894. When Bentley got down to the design work, Vaughan proved an understanding client. 'Having laid down certain conditions as to size, space, chapels and style, I left the rest to him,' he wrote. 'He offered me the choice between a vaulted roof and one of saucer-shaped domes; I chose the latter. He wished to build two campaniles; I said one would be enough for me. For the rest he had a free hand.' The result was a building with three shallow domes over the nave and one over the sanctuary. The nave dome nearest the sanctuary covers the crossing: there are notional transepts to either side. These, though, are difficult to read because the nave arcade is continued through them – an idea for which medieval precedent exists at Pisa. Space was left for chapels along the aisles. After much discussion, it was decided that the campanile – tall and slender – should arise at the (liturgically) northwest end.

He was proud to have been able to build the whole structure on old-fashioned lines, without resorting to iron reinforcements.

By April 1897, the walls had reached a height of seven foot, and Bentley could write that the 'red brick facing is making a great show.' Nearly 12.5 million bricks would be used in the cathedral, many of them – all that can be seen, anyway – handmade. They needed to be strong, to withstand the weight of the building, and those used in the crypt and sub-crypt had to be waterproof. Five types were chosen in the end, including

FIG 36
Inside Westminster Cathedral. While Bentley's great building was opened to services in 1903, the interior remains a work in progress, being covered in rich marble and mosaics as money allows. The vaults and domes, their exposed brickwork black from candle smoke and incense, have a cavernous quality, unlike that of any other structure in Britain.

Staffordshire blue (machine-made) engineering brick. While red is the colour of the external walls, the Cathedral's interior is lined with tawny London stocks, intentionally rough so that the plaster into which mosaics would one day be set would adhere to them. Over a century later, the scheme is only partially finished, and as Mgr. Mark Langham has written, the 'bare brick' creates 'an atmosphere of mystery, yearning and poignancy'.

Bentley died in 1902. His death was followed the next summer by that of Cardinal Vaughan. But the Cathedral on which they had both laboured was complete. Regular services were held from 1903.

"...an atmosphere of mystery, yearning and poignancy."

According to the Official Handbook for the consecration, the 'vast nave' was 'higher and wider than any nave in England.' There are twenty-nine marble columns throughout the building, the eight supporting the galleries of the nave being made from green verde antico marble; this had been used during Ancient times, not least in Hagia Sofia, but the quarry had become lost. It had recently been located, excavated and reopened at Larissa, on the Greek mainland, by the marble merchant William Brindley. Brindley also discovered the workings of cipollino marble on the Island of Evia, Porta Santa on Chios, and Imperial Porphyry at Gebel Dokhan in the Egyptian Eastern Desert, through which he travelled with his wife, nineteen Bedouin and fifteen camels. As well as columns, these ancient quarries supplied the marble that panelled the walls.

Bentley intended that domes and other surfaces would shine with mosaic. But he did not leave directions as to what form they should take. The decoration, which has proceeded in line with the fundraising, is still some way from completion, and shows the work of many hands. The baldachino, sixty-five feet high and covering a High Altar of unpolished Cornish granite that weighs twelve and a half tons, was erected in 1908. Robert Weird Schultz designed the Chapel of St Andrew and the Saints of Scotland in 1910, a commission that he had received from the Third Marquess of Bute before the latter's death in 1900 (it was continued by his successor, the Fourth Marquess). It is furnished with ebony and bone choir stalls by Ernest Gimson. Eric Gill made the Stations of the Cross, on the faces of the piers, in 1913-14. The original pulpit, thought to be too small, was remodelled by the cathedral architect L.H.Shattock in 1934. The marble revetments to the galleries date from the 1950s. The mosaics in the Chapel of the

Blessed Sacrament were made by Boris Anrep in 1960-62. These were also the years during which the gilt bronze statue of St Patrick was made and installed in his chapel, by Arthur Pollen. And so it continues. The mosaic in St David's Chapel was blessed by His Holiness the Pope in 2010. St David is known as the Waterman, either because he mortified his flesh by praying in water or, as the artist Ifor Davies shows him, beaker in hand, because he drank only water. The work, largely made by Tessa Hunkin from the Mosaic Workshop, demonstrates that the art of mosaic making is far from dead – and just as well: the eleventh and present Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, has set his mind on completing the domes.

Fig 37
Mosaic by Tom Phillips in the Chapel of St George and the English Martyrs, opened in 2016. The names of the 40 Catholic martyrs are emblazoned a dark sky.

Fig 38
Westminster Cathedral from the campanile. To the right of Bentley's Byzantine saucer domes can be seen the playground of Westminster Cathedral Choir School. The trees in the upper left of the photograph show Vincent Square.

Westminster Cathedral Choir

For six days a week during term time, and at the major religious feasts, congregations at Westminster Cathedral can hear one of the great choirs of the world. On school days, the 25 boy choristers study at Westminster Choir School, with a range of other boys, not all of them musical; but their timetable has an extra dimension, with an hour's practice at 8am. They reconvene at 4.30pm, when they are joined by the professional lay clerks before singing at the 5.30pm Mass. On Sundays they sing in the cathedral at 10.30am and 3.30pm. Martin Baker, Master of Music at the Cathedral since 2000, explains that 'the choristers, who board at the Cathedral Choir School, sing both the treble and alto lines, which is unique for a cathedral choir in this country. They are joined by up to ten professional lay clerks – four basses, four tenors and two counter tenors. One of the defining characteristics of the choir's sound is that the alto line is a mixture of counter tenors and boys.' The distinctive sound of the choir means that it is greatly in demand, both for recording and foreign tours from Norway to New Zealand, and from Australia to the USA.

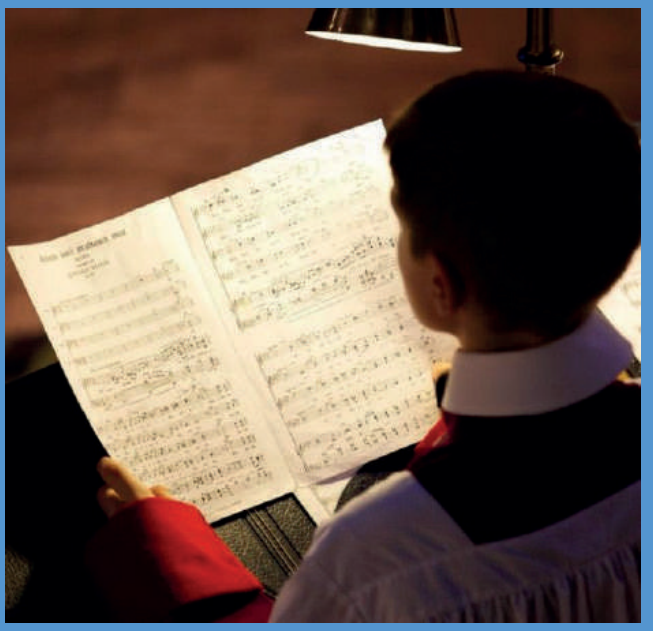

FIG 39
A chorister at Westminster Cathedral.

10. Victoria Replanned

In the twentieth century, three principal factors conspired to make Victoria a less appealing environment in which to live and work. The first was, in effect, a sign that in becoming a transport hub Victoria was a victim of its own success. Victoria Station and, after its opening in 1868, the underground station connecting it to what became the District Line, created the busiest commuter inter-change in West London. In 1932, the opening of the Victoria Coach Station adjacent to the railway terminus on Buckingham Palace Road brought charabancs to the area and added to the perception of Victoria as being one massive transport inter-change – a place for passing through on the way to somewhere else – as much as a destination in its own right. The consequences of this will be examined more fully in the final chapter.

The next factor – though one hardly unique to Victoria – was bomb damage during the Second World War. Like all strategically important stations, the tracks, shed and terminus at Victoria were targets for the Luftwaffe and endured multiple hits but Victoria Street and its immediate neighbourhood were also heavily peppered with bombs. The Army and Navy store was severely, though not irreparably, damaged. Worse was the damage done at the Westminster end of Victoria Street to Victoria Chambers and St Margaret's Mansions which was on such a scale that they both had to be demolished. Elsewhere, many buildings were hit but were repairable. Whether post-war developers wanted them to be repaired was another matter. The aesthetics of Victorian architecture had fallen out of fashion and the opportunity to replace the existing line of buildings along Victoria Street with new modern blocks, into which more office floor space could be fitted, was an opportunity that seemed too good to miss. But it was to prove the third factor in

Victoria's declining appeal.

Overwhelmingly the new developments were speculative rather than being built to order for a client. But they filled a need for more office space from corporate and public sector tenants whose expansion was frustrated by the shortage of suitable space in post-Blitz London. Oil companies and, in particular, one of the great areas of post-war growth, government bureaucracy, moved in. In consequence, Victoria became second only to Whitehall as the primary location for the siting of government departments. In catering for this influx, developers benefited from the almost unbridled support of both Westminster City Council and the London County Council. While the new structures went up piecemeal, the ultimate ambition was for the total redevelopment of the entire area. As late as the 1970s the aim remained to leave none of Victoria Street's pre-1940 buildings standing.

Although Victoria Street had started off in the 1850s as an avenue of offices and apartments, by the Second World War it had become a genuinely mixed-use area, with a variety of shops joining the residential and office tenancies. The post-war redevelopment erased this mix, turning Victoria – and Victoria Street in particular – into what was overwhelmingly an office mono-culture. Most of the new blocks – Kingsway House was an exception – were designed without the capacity to lease shop space on the ground floor. Those who developed and let the new Victoria seemed indifferent to how a diverse and vibrant local economy and community might be funded and sustained.

Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s the Victorian mansion flats, chambers and offices were systematically bulldozed and in their place rose some of the most startlingly unimaginative buildings anywhere in post-war London. The practice of Sir John Burnet, Tait & Partners was responsible between 1960 and 1966 for Mobil House, the long horizontal slab of Kingsgate House and the high vertical slab block of Westminster City Hall. The latter was generously described by the modernist-loving architectural historian, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, as 'an impressive plain slab of nineteen storeys' and it was certainly impressive in the sense that it imposed itself.

At the same time, fresh from his experiences in Chicago, Max Gordon designed in steel, granite and glass another speculative office development which in 1967 became home to the Metropolitan Police. Pevsner hastily proclaimed it 'excellent.' On a longer view, the best that could reasonably be said for the building in question, New Scotland Yard, was that it demonstrates clean lines. No other articulation to break-up its wearisomely

Fig 40
Portland House, completed in 1963.

faceless banality was attempted. At pedestrian level, the ground floor treated the passer-by with thoughtless indifference.

Such buildings (among them the similar Department of Business, Innovation and Skills block at the eastern end of Victoria Street) showed almost total disregard for the civic environment. Facades were faceless and impenetrable. Decoration and detail were banished because they were deemed at odds with the modernist dogma that the only valid form was one that followed function. There was no effort to engage or turn a welcoming aspect for the passer-by; no interest was created at street level. This was a cityscape that jettisoned the notion of the shared or civic space. Here was not a place to gather with friends or to pleasurably amble around. There was just road traffic and buildings, with little thought given to the communal spaces in-between. The disregard for the pedestrian was as great as the lack of interest in creating any sense of place.

Ease for the car or taxi to either access or bypass remained the priority. In 1971 there was even a plan to construct a concrete 'cab track' on stilts above the pavements along the entire length of Victoria Street (and across other prime sites in London too), an idea that would have cast shadow across ground, giving the streetscape the permanent aspect of a dark and damp underpass. Thankfully, the cab track never took flight and the recession of the 1970s (together with the launch of the conservation movement) happened just in time to prevent the remaining Victorian buildings being bulldozed. What Victoria Street was left with was a singular achievement: bland buildings that nonetheless succeeded in making the people who passed them look marginal and insignificant.

The result of these developments was to deprive the area of its sense of street life, of living spirit and community. In particular, the decision to ensure the domination of office space over both retail and residential properties at a major commuter inter-change meant that outside the rush hour at the start of the working day and the rush hour at the end of it, there was little sign of life in Victoria. A prime location in the greatest city in Europe was at night left to resemble a ghost town.

The planning brief set out in 2011 by Westminster City Council pointed out that Victoria was 'unique as a central London artery in that it has changed completely since the Second World War.' The result was a 'lack' of 'coherent sense of place and of urban quality.' It was little wonder that the council, therefore, welcomed the current plans to restore that sense and quality. As Canary Wharf has demonstrated, it is perfectly possible to develop a new business-orientated area which

Fig 41
Overview of Victoria Street. The Brown bulk of Windsor House (centre), built in 1973 with Westminster Abbey (right) and 62 Buckingham Gate (left).

although dominated by offices and office workers nevertheless retains a sense of place and purpose beyond being merely a day time venue to sit at desks and tap at keyboards. The extent of Canary Wharf's retail turnover at the weekends shows what can be achieved when the attraction of the right mix of clients and uses turns a place to do business into a richer, more varied experience, one to which customers and visitors wish to return outside normal office hours. If (but for a few converted warehouses) an essentially new development like Canary Wharf could manage this, what might be achieved by a rejuvenated Victoria with all its natural advantages of a well-connected central location that is just within the border of the West End's theatreland and next to both the country's political quarter of Westminster and the green space of St James's Park? This has been the thinking behind the many development projects undertaken by VBID, custodians and stewards of the area since 2010. Looking to transform the area into a vibrant public space, VBID has been responsible for the district's recent improvements; introducing innovative environmental solutions, including the Green Infrastructure Audit; working with local businesses and the police to ensure best practice when it comes to safety in the area; and guiding the development of new building and infrastructure in ways that will improve the public's experience of living and working in this upcoming area of central London. The establishment of this organisation reflects renewed interest in Victoria and cements the visions of many to rejuvenate the district.

Having lapsed from the 1960s onwards into becoming merely a venue to which commuters arrived, worked and then commuted back home again without greatly engaging with local amenities and entertainments, Victoria is finally in the process of rediscovering what makes a successful business district really tick.

One of the rediscoveries is a renewed interest in urbanism – the interplay of people with the built environment around them. In Victoria this is taking a number of forms, among them: the redesign of open spaces to make them more agreeable for the pedestrian and – related to this – finding ways to alleviate traffic congestion; the re-examination of the quality of public realm architecture; efforts to restore a mixture of uses and the attraction of shops catering for both general and specialist markets, restaurants and other attractions so that Victoria's heart continues to beat beyond rush hour. All this, of course, is easier said than done. The street layout of Victoria is not (and since its development in the 1840s has never been) generous with its open spaces. This is a reality that needs to be accepted and worked

Fig 42
Grosvenor Gardens.

around. But given the almost total indifference of the post-war developers to the public realm, any improvement, no matter how small, makes a difference.

Some changes may seem almost trivial but actually make substantive improvements to the day to day experience of those circulating round the area on foot. The objective is to ensure pedestrian circulation is visually led, rather than sign led. Removing some of the unnecessary traffic sign 'clutter' and remodelling the pavements and street furniture in order to make walking around a less halting and vexing experience is at the core of the strategy. The Grosvenor Estate has led the way in showing what can be achieved by removing the barriers that used to give Buckingham Place Road something of the aspect of a fortified defence line. Grosvenor has also been responsible for repaving and improving the street furniture in Mount Street and Elizabeth Street (now one of the most agreeable avenues of high end shopping down which to promenade anywhere in London). The de-cluttering there has included the removal of unnecessary traffic lights. Far from this proving a danger to pedestrians, the reverse has proved to be the case. Traffic is flowing more smoothly while the subtle blurring of the distinction between pedestrian and vehicular zones has made both for more careful driving and for the greater ease with which pedestrians are able to cross roads.

Not only does this make the public realm a more agreeable place to roam and Victoria a pleasanter place in which to spend time, it has beneficial effects for the local economy. A place that encourages the human desire to wander, to amble, to browse, is well set to have a flourishing commercial sector through an increasing footfall in its shops, cafes and restaurants. This is a virtuous circle, since the more there are such amenities to visit, the more pedestrians will want to stay and explore. However, the public realm is challenged by the quantity of transport and commuters arriving and passing through the area. Its central location and its profusion of transport have made the area a relatively easy place in which to commute to work. But the sheer weight of numbers passing through Victoria is also part of the problem.

There are three main transport issues. The first two concern the railway and underground links. At the moment, Victoria is second only to Waterloo as Britain's busiest railway station: 73.5 million travellers enter and exit it every year. These figures are projected to grow by 20 per cent by 2020. As owner and manager, Network Rail wishes to redevelop the station concourse, designs for which are currently being looked at. Development will have to fit in with the station's listed status

Fig 43
Victoria Station: second only to Waterloo as Britain's busiest station.

Fig 44
The new entrance to Victoria underground station, opened in 2017.

Fig 45
Victoria Coach Station built in 1932.

Fig 46
Traffic in Victoria.

but, given the now rather tired look of some of the retail kiosks on the concourse, there is much that can be done to improve both the look and circulation flow of the station without defacing any of the station's Victorian and Edwardian grandeur. A small example of what can be achieved has been demonstrated with the unblocking of an archway previously occupied by a branch of Boots the chemist. More fitting for an archway, it now proclaims a new pedestrian walk way in to Wilton Road.

In recent years it has become clear that Victoria underground station can no longer cope with eighty million passengers every year. As it is, access to the platforms has to be restricted and even closed for periods during rush hour as part of the efforts to prevent dangerous overcrowding. That projected future usage suggested further strong growth meant that congestion would only get worse unless action was taken to increase capacity. Action is now being taken, with over £700 million invested in upgrading the underground station and its facilities. The most important aspect of this is the building of a new north ticket hall next to the Victoria Palace Theatre on the corner of Victoria Street and Bressenden Place with an entrance leading on to the street, opposite Cardinal Place. This will ensure that employees, visitors and customers to the offices and shops on the north side of Victoria Street and to Cardinal Place and new Victoria Circle in particular, will no longer have to navigate their way across the traffic of Victoria Street in order to get to the tube. Beneath the street a new tunnel is being excavated which will connect this north ticket hall to an enlarged south ticket hall serving the Victoria line and ease the flow of passengers. Nine new escalators are being installed along with lifts allowing step-free access not only from the street to the ticket halls and platform levels but also between the Victoria, District and Circle lines and the National Rail platforms of Victoria Station, the latter also connected by a wider staircase. Construction of the upgrade is now underway. The north ticket hall opened in early 2017 with the aim to have the rest of the upgrade complete in 2018. As a result, Victoria underground station will be 50 per cent larger than it is currently while offering a considerably less congested and more accessible experience to its users.

Victoria's third major transport issue concerns the Victoria Coach Station. Built in 1932 and extended in the 1980s, it has separate arrival and departure terminals facing each other on the corner of Buckingham Palace Road and Elizabeth Street. What is more, by 2026, it will be primarily responsible for an expected 500,000 coach

movements in Victoria per year. The problem of traffic congestion, caused by the congregation of so many coaches converging from long distance British and continental European pick-up points is of a different order to that created by the busyness of Victoria's mainline and underground network. While trains, the tube and indeed buses convey workers, visitors and customers to Victoria, helping to make possible the success of the area as a destination, this is much less the case with the coach terminal. As the customers are often at the budget end of the market and tend to travel straight onto another destination, the footfall they bring to Victoria's retailers is minimal. The constraints of its site, part of which is owned by Transport for London and part of it by the Grosvenor Estate, would make the Coach Station's expansion to meet anticipated future demand problematic on the grounds of physical reality alone.

"A place that encourages the human desire to wander, to amble, to browse..."

Both Grosvenor and Westminster City Council are open to exploring if and how Victoria's coach terminations could be eased. Various alternatives present themselves. One is an expansion of the coach terminal at Heathrow which is already the second biggest in the UK. An alternative posits the creation of several medium sized coach terminals, each suitable for a different area of London, thereby increasing the destination choices for travellers and spreading more equitably the traffic load among different boroughs. This would allow the Victoria Coach Station to remain while easing the current congestion difficulties experienced in the area.

Away from transport, the most exciting aspects of Victoria's rejuvenation are manifest in its return to being a place that mixes business, residential and retail uses, rather than merely being a commuter-friendly repository of dull utilitarian office blocks. The expiry of leases signed in the late 1960s and 1970s on many of the post-war slabs has provided an opportunity for their redevelopment. Not only that, the switch in government policy towards decentralising staff – wherever tenable relocating civil servants' jobs out of London and into locations in the rest of the country – has provided the opportunity to seek new private sector clients. Whatever their qualities, civil servants enjoyed or endured a reputation for being somewhat parsimonious in their working week spending habits. Besides the sheer lack of retail facilities provided in the

Fig 47
The moon rises through the old and the new. Westminster Cathedral tower (left) and the recently refurbished 123 Victoria Street (right).

designs by the 1960s architects, this trait may have explained the correlation between the high number of public sector employees working in Victoria with the relatively disappointing array of shops, restaurants and related facilities. While around 90 per cent of the rental value of buildings in Victoria is typically generated above the first floor (i.e. in letting to offices rather than to shops), the sort of private sector companies now interested in making Victoria their base also tend to appreciate a more enticing and varied local environment. Led by Landsec's new developments, the area is adapting to these requirements, demonstrating how the commercial imperative can rejuvenate an area. As a result, Victoria is regaining its joie de vivre.

"...the current redevelopments involve not only business premises and retail outlets but also the new accommodation that makes this corner of SW1 once again a place to call home."

The process was given a major boost through Landsec's development of Cardinal Place. Designed by EPR Architects and completed in 2006, its erection was no simple task: it rests on rubber shock absorbers in order to prevent the District and Circle lines underneath causing tremors. Among the clients who quickly established themselves in its 563,000 square feet of office space were EDF Energy and Microsoft UK. It also brought 27 retail shops, among them some of the country's leading brands, to Victoria; its airy and dramatic arcade avoiding what can be the rather sterile atmosphere of some indoor shopping malls and the construction of a roof garden increasing the accessible public spaces of the area.

It is thanks, partly, to Cardinal Place that the number of restaurants and cafes along Victoria Street has increased from 14 in 2002 to 25 six years later. Opposite Cardinal Place, directly east of the Westminster Cathedral Piazza, at 123 Victoria Street, Landsec have refurbished the former Ashdown House. What was previously a tatty 1970s block has been transformed into a range of sparkling cubes, glistening in the light and offering over 170,000 square feet of office space above shops at street level. Perhaps its most attractive feature is that because of its slender width it enjoys excellent natural light.

Fig 48
Cardinal Place, completed in 2006.

Fig 49
62 Buckingham Gate, completed in 2013.

Among the clients taking advantage of this is Jimmy Choo who has moved its headquarters into it from its previous location in Kensington. In choosing Victoria for its HQ, Jimmy Choo is far from being the only luxury fashion house to see the advantage in moving to a rejuvenated SW1. LVMH, Burberry, Tom Ford and Richemont have all done likewise. Meanwhile, on the north side of Victoria Street, Cardinal Place has been joined by other major redevelopments by Landsec. Next to Westminster City Hall, the 13-storey prism-like structure of 62 Buckingham Gate, conceived by architects Pelli Clarke Pelli and Swanke Hayden & Connell, creates 252,400 square feet of new prime office space, with high-profile retail units at ground level. What makes the building particularly intriguing is the way in which the movement of the sun catches its slanting surfaces, changing the colour reflected as the day goes on.

Even grander plans have taken shape on the 2.5 acre site framed by Victoria Street, Buckingham Palace Road, Bressenden Place and Allington Street. What was for three hundred years until 1959 the Stag Brewery became thereafter a traffic island populated with mostly uninspiring 1960s architecture of which the Thistle Hotel proved to be an exemplar. That this eyesore fronted on to the Royal Mews of Buckingham Palace added insult to injury. Now Landsec has transformed the site into Nova, formerly Victoria Circle, a mixed use (office, retail and residential) development, the first phase of which was completed in 2016 with the second phase following two years later and being served by the new north ticket hall entrance to the Victoria underground station. Other than the drabness of their architectural offerings, the greatest error of Victoria's post-war developers was to forget the need to keep the area as a tapestry of interweaving fabrics. The failure to honour this ensured that it seemed as if all activity expired when, every weekday evening, the office lights were switched off. Here, in particular, a lesson has been learned. For the current redevelopments involve not only business premises and retail outlets but also the new accommodation that makes this corner of SW1 once again a place to call home.

Housing for key workers is part of the mix in the development of Victoria Circle and the pre-existing but vacant and dilapidated cottages on Castle Lane and Palace Street are being renovated by Landsec. Once restored and extended, they will be set aside to provide affordable housing. Meanwhile, at Buckingham Gate, 59 high-end apartments have been developed in Wellington House, bringing back – albeit in a modern garb – the style of the mansion blocks that did so much to make Victoria a desirable address before the war. Where until recently the depressingly

FIG 50
Landsec's Nova Development, completed in 2017.

unimaginative office block slab of Kingsgate House deadened the mood between Cardinal Place and Westminster City Hall, Patrick Lynch's design created two new buildings which break up the former horizontal monotony, creating a new north-south axis and access to the previously obscured Westminster City School and St James's Hotel. On its completion in 2015, it added 102 new apartments to Victoria's renaissance as a residential quarter.

Finally, there is Victoria's full re-absorption into London's West End. During the decades in which poor planning and letting decisions did their best to suck the life out of Victoria in the evenings, the Palace and Apollo theatres nevertheless continued to put on some of the most popular musicals of the past thirty years, including Starlight Express, Buddy, Billy Elliot, Wicked and Hamilton. Serious drama, however, perished with the closure and then fire that in 2002 swept away the Westminster Theatre on Palace Street. Ten years later, in September 2012, the phoenix finally rose from that fire with, on the same site, the opening of London's first newly constructed theatre for thirty years. This is the St James Theatre (now The Other Palace). With 312 seats in its main auditorium, supplemented by a further 100 seat studio theatre, it fills a gap in London's market, being in size between the very small stages typically found in revue bars or above pubs on the one hand and, on the other, the much larger West End theatres whose need to fill their larger capacity and balance resulting costs mitigates against creative risk taking. Thus The Other Palace's aim is to showcase promising drama that might, with acclaim, thereafter transfer to the larger West End theatres. As such, it has the promise to be one of the most significant promoters of the craft of playwriting in Britain. It also includes a restaurant, to which diners enter in style, via what must surely be the most extraordinary staircase to grace a brasserie anywhere in London, crafted in 200 tonnes of Carrara marble to the design of the sculptor Mark Humphrey and called, fittingly, 'final encore.' It is emblematic of Victoria's renewed sense of arrival.

"She has long been a lady-in-waiting, but finally Victoria is able to plan for her coronation."

Future generations may reflect on how odd it was that an area right in the heart of the greatest city in Europe could have been considered unfashionable and soulless for much of the second half of the twentieth century. It may seem inexplicable to those reflecting on the Victoria that

Fig 51
New Victoria Underground Station entrance
at Cardinal Place.

graced London from the second decade of the twenty-first century onwards, with its profusion of popular and high end shops, its theatres and restaurants, its desirability as a residential address and as a location in which some of the era's most famous creative industries, including Microsoft and Google, as well as some of the country's leading fashion houses, chose to have their UK headquarters. In truth, the promise that Victoria held was there long before the vision and investment was found in the 2010s. A place that can claim for its own the Neo-Byzantine basilica of Westminster Cathedral and the magnificent Victorian and Edwardian facades of its railway station, Grosvenor Gardens and the Goring Hotel in addition to being within walking distance of the stucco fronted classicism of Belgravia and Pimlico, the royal residence of Buckingham Palace and of St James's Park, of the Houses of Parliament and of Westminster Abbey, was always in line to succeed. She has long been a lady-in-waiting, but finally Victoria is able to plan for her coronation.

The Goring Hotel

The Goring is unique among London's luxury hotels: it is still run by the family which founded it more than a century ago. Otto Goring, great-grandfather of the present CEO, Jeremy Goring, cleared the site near Buckingham Palace, in what is now Beeston Place, by demolishing a pub and some cottages. The hotel opened in 1910. It stood, according to an advertisement in The Times, 'in its own ground of well laid-out Gardens, away from any Street Noises.' Every bedroom had its own bathroom, telephone, hot water radiator and lobby. These features made it 'the most Ideal Hotel in this Metropolis.'

The hotel is still blessed with the Goring Gardens, and some of the dishes served in a restaurant celebrated for British cuisine (delicious eggs drumkilbo, for example) would have been more familiar to Edwardian guests. With only 69 rooms, it thinks of itself as a Baby Grand. But this is still an instrument that can make plenty of noise when it needs to. In 2011, the Goring became the Middleton family's centre of operations during Prince William's marriage to their daughter, Kate. The hotel has been full ever since.

Fig 52
Entrance to the Goring Hotel.

11. Victoria Rejuvenated

Victoria is now one of the most dynamic areas in London. For seven years, the area next to Victoria Station has seen engineering works on a Herculean scale. These have provided new shops, offices, apartments and hotels, above an underground station that is double the size of the old one. Victoria is the fourth busiest tube station on the London Underground network, but has long been inadequate for the 82 million journeys passing through it each year; in the rush hour, it can take 40 minutes simply to get into the station. So regular commuters were excited to see the opening of the first new entrance, at the junction of Bressenden Place and Victoria Street, in 2017 – so much so that some tweeted photographs of the escalators. The rest of the new station is scheduled to open in 2018. Passengers will not only find 20 new ticket gates, nine new escalators and eight new lifts, but they will emerge into the sleek architectural geometry of the new urban quartier of Nova: permission to build on the 5.5 acre site represents the largest single planning consent ever given by Westminster Council. With their trees and café tables, the spaces between the Nova blocks provide a new experience for the pedestrian, away from the often clogged traffic around Victoria Station.

Most of the north-east side of Victoria has been rebuilt in recent years, or is in the process of reinvention. The old Victoria Street was a canyon of monolithic slabs, built either side of 1970. It was joyless and alienating. Much of the fabric has now changed. VBID has overlooked these development processes with a view to protecting public interest; encouraging the kind of exciting architecture that, throughout London's history, has drawn people to this district. Westminster City Hall, a high-rise office building of the 1960s, is now a lonely bastion of the Modernist aesthetic, being now flanked by structures of greater

Fig 53
Trees and benches featured in Landsec's Nova development.

dynamism. The shiny façade of 62 Buckingham Gate is faceted like a prism; the step-backs of another block gave it an instant nickname – the Zigzag Building. Sadly for pedestrians, the scale of these epic structures has not changed, and pedestrians are apt to feel dwarfed as they hurry along the crowded pavements. But the architectural experience is unquestionably more vibrant than before; a little bit of New York has found its way into the London streetscape. There is also a more lively choice of shops and restaurants than before.

Victoria has always been a prime, if sometimes neglected, location, next to those seats of power – the Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace. It has come to seem even more central as financial institutions that one would once have been drawn inescapably to the City of London have established themselves in the West End. Growing Victoria as a centre for commerce has been one of the BID's chief missions and its reputation as such is now well-established, encouraging businesses from all over the world to base offices in the area. Naturally, Victoria Street continues to be convenient for Parliament; but the government offices that used to be a significant presence have in several cases moved out. Take Eland House, on Bressenden Place, for example. Built in the 1990s, it used to be occupied by the Department of the Environment; but the name has now changed,

and so has the nature of the building. It's now Verde, whose green credentials are displayed in six roof gardens, spreading over a total of more than 20,000 square feet. There is a dedicated bicycle entrance with 440 bicycle spaces, with showers and changing rooms. Amongst other companies calling Verde their home, it is now the headquarters of Pret.

In a similar transition, the old metropolitan police headquarters, New Scotland Yard, at the Parliament Square end of Victoria Street, has been demolished. In its place will arise The Broadway, a development of super luxury apartments by Northacre. Between six blocks of between 14 and 19 storeys will be new urban spaces, including a new street and retail spaces. The Broadway is one of two major schemes by Northacre in Victoria, the other being 1 Palace Street, an island site opposite Buckingham Palace – indeed, some apartments overlook the Buckingham Palace garden. Although 72 apartments are being created behind the retained facades, whose different styles – Italian and French Renaissance, Beaux Arts and Queen Anne styles – set the theme for the interiors behind them. These projects reflect an important shift in perceptions. Although 1 Palace Street occupies a position next to London's premier royal palace, and The Broadway is only a short stroll from the Houses of Parliament, neither side would have been considered super prime, in property terms, a few years ago. They were in Victoria, not Mayfair, Belgravia, Kensington or Notting Hill. But Victoria has upped its game.

In the old days, most people came to Victoria because they had to; it was a transport hub and workplace. There were some handsome, red-brick mansion blocks around the cathedral but little to detain the non-resident. It was not a vibrant area. Despite the presence of the Apollo and Victoria Palace Theatre, the food offering could most generously be described as limited. Why come to this area if you didn't need to? The new Victoria is livelier. The creatives who work at Tom Ford and Jimmy Choo are happy to be seen here: both companies have their corporate headquarters in Howick Place. Also on Howick Place are Phillips de Pury, the super cool American art auctioneer, whose London gallery occupies a warehouse formerly used by the Post Office. At the other end of the artistic spectrum, the elegantly classical Queen's Gallery at Buckingham Palace is distinguished for the superb quality of the Old Master exhibitions it mounts as part of a changing programme year by year.

Victoria now offers a variety of eating places as well as high end shops and a Curzon cinema. A Michelin star now shines above A.Wong on Wilton Road, a street that is becoming something

FIG 54
Wind Sculpture, by Yinka Shonibare MBE in Howick Place.

of a food destination. Restaurants are opening in Victoria; they are closing in Belgravia and Knightsbridge where high costs aren't offset by access to an affluent local clientele, because so many home owners are only part-time residents. The St James Theatre has now become The Other Palace, Andrew Lloyd-Webber's latest venture; the restaurant is now the second restaurant of Joe and Margaux Sharratt, who were celebrated for the Naughty Piglets in Brixton.

Residents and visitors must make their way through Queen Anne's Gate and across Birdcage Walk to St James's Park, if they need to revive themselves with green lawns and majestic trees, not to mention flamingos. But slowly Victoria is learning to make better use of what it has. Every corner is important in this densely urban setting. So the handkerchief of green space known as Christchurch Gardens, at the junction of Victoria Street and Broadway, is being revived. There is an ambition to better articulate the Piazza in the front of Westminster Cathedral, a large and potentially exciting open space which has a neglected air. The agenda to improve the public realm is being championed by the Victoria BID, as demonstrated by their work with the garden designer Lee Bestall to create a garden at the RHS 2016 Chelsea Flower Show for the Sir Simon Milton Foundation to showcase the role that high quality public spaces have in bringing communities and generations together. Watch this (urban) space.

A concomitant of Victoria's position as an outstanding transport hub is the presence of rough sleepers, who have in some cases been attracted to the bright lights of the capital but are unable to find accommodation they can afford once there. It is good news that The Passage, London's largest voluntary sector resource centre for homeless and vulnerable people, whose ethos is inspired by the seventeenth century St Vincent de Paul, has been able to refurbish its Vincent Centre in Carlisle Place at a cost of £80 million.

Altogether, Victoria is undergoing a Renaissance. But the process isn't complete. One challenge is the lack of incubator space for new businesses. The developments around Victoria station have been big, verging on mega – new businesses need cheap and flexible spaces, of the type traditionally provided by old buildings at the end of their first phase of existence. A way forward, though, is being shown by the Grosvenor Estate's Eccleston Yards, near Victoria Coach Station; around a landscaped courtyard, which can be used for a variety of events, a previously derelict space has been provided for 19 units for food, fashion, retail, co-working and wellbeing – 'a new destination for innovative entrepreneurs,' as it is described by architects Buckley Gray Yeoman.

Fig 55
Glynn Williams' 1994 sculpture Henry Purcell sculpture in Christchurch Gardens.

This is something that could be replicated by Victoria, particularly if some of the space currently consumed by its many transport hubs was opened up to development. As discussed, efforts are currently underway to reduce the volume and experience of passengers passing through the area, on coaches, trains and the underground. Similarly, the role of Victoria Railway Station is being reconsidered.

At a time when nearly every railway terminus in London has been modernised – and plans are afoot to rebuild Euston as the London end of HS2 – Victoria's looks increasingly left behind. One of the busiest stations in the country, it is also one of the least popular, according to surveys of customer satisfaction. As the gateway to Gatwick Airport, it is far from glamorous. If Victoria Station were reimagined as successfully as St Pancras, King's

Cross and Liverpool Street have been, it could both contribute to the success of the area, and benefit from the regeneration that has been already achieved.

There are other issues with Victoria, which kindly planners could ameliorate. We know what Victoria Street does. Originally it provided residential accommodation for the well-to-do; shops came with the Army and Navy Stores – and stayed. The street is now lined with shops for almost its whole length, and above them are offices. But where does it lead? And what's it like to go down?

The answer to the first question may seem to be answered, simply by looking at a map. Victoria Street goes from Victoria Station to Westminster Abbey – but it doesn't arrive there with any style. However, VBID has been instrumental in supporting the possible establishment of a neighbouring Victoria Westminster BID with a footprint that would include the area that leads up to the Abbey and Parliament Square. VBID and Victoria Westminster BID would work together as one and recognise Victoria Street's important role here; this is Westminster Abbey! Architecturally, historically and by association, it's one of the two or three most important buildings in Britain. Victoria Street doesn't exactly greet it with fanfares. On the contrary, the junction of Victoria Street (which becomes at this point Broad Sanctuary) and Parliament Square is awkward. On the Abbey side, the pavements are so crowded that tourists and passers-by sometimes have to walk in the road.

"Victoria has always been a prime... location, next to those seats of power – the Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace."

And yet opposite the Abbey, in front the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre, there is space in spades – some of it in the form of a raised lawn, which seems to have been made deliberately, if bizarrely inaccessible. Here there is an opportunity. The roadway of Victoria Street (Broad Sanctuary) should take a step to the side, away from the Abbey. This would free up more room for pavement, where it is needed. At the same time, the ill-defined yard in front of the west front of the Abbey, around W.E.Nesfield's beautiful but overlooked cross to the Fallen of the Crimea, should be redesigned. At present, it is shared between pedestrians and vehicles, to the benefit of neither. This could easily be made into a piazza for the benefit of

Fig 56
People bustling at Strutton Ground Market.

visitors to the Abbey – shared with coaches from Buckingham Palace on royal occasions. Taxis and delivery vehicles going to Dean's Yard could have their own roadway.

These suggestions are made at a time when change could be about to come to this area, through a proposal to close Abingdon Street (which separates Westminster Abbey from the Houses of Parliament) for security reasons. This would remove a busy thoroughfare that has, for as long as anyone can remember, sundered the Abbey from the Palace – two entities that, from their inception, were considered as part of a single whole. If Abingdon Street closes, the need for Parliament Square to serve as a giant traffic island will be removed. Dare we hope that this exceptional London space will be treated as Trafalgar Square was in 2003, when the north side was closed and united to the National Gallery? Except when occupied by protesters, the lawn of Parliament Square must represent some of the least-used acreage in prime central London. Parliament Square has never been a triumph of urbanism: statues of deceased statesmen stand around its fringe like wall-flowers at a dance. Its moment, however, may now have come. The

ensemble formed by Westminster Abbey and the Palace of Westminster deserves generous treatment. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

And let's hope that Westminster City Council takes advantage of it, by humanising Victoria Street. For much of its length, the scale of the buildings to either side is apt to be overbearing. There is little to be done about that in the immediate future. But some relatively modest changes would mitigate the canyon-like effect. For example, the angular, overhanging design of the lampposts is aggressive: they should be changed for ones of softer contour. Perhaps space could be made for stalls selling street food, generating a sense of life. While Westminster Cathedral is well-displayed behind its square, the latter is underused. Surely here is a chance to bring some vibrancy to an area which seems permanently to have its head bent over its shoes: it hurries from one place to another, not looking up. With theatres and restaurants as well as shops, Victoria Street isn't simply a workaday thoroughfare, conveying commuters from offices to railway station. It should be about joy.

And there's much for it to be cheerful about, if only it would lift up its eyes and look.

"And there's much for it to be cheerful about, if only it would lift up its eyes and look."

FIG 57
Gilded statue of Anna Pavlova dancing on top of the Victtoria Palace Theatre.

Image Acknowledgments

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Westminster Cathdral, © Victoria BID.

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Fig 5

Perspective view of the old Palace of Westminster in the reign of Henry VIII, H J Brewer, 1884. Contains Parliamentary information licensed under the Open Parliament Licence v3.0.

Fig 6

"Westminster Abbey" from Baedeker, Karl. Baedeker's London and Its Environs. Ninth Revised Edition. Leipsic, 1894. Public Domain.

Fig 7

Westminster Abbey nave with its fan-vaulted ceiling. Credit - *Aiwok*, 2011. GNU Free documentation License. CC BY-SA 3.0, 2.5, 2.0,1.0

Fig 8

West side of Westminster Abbey in London, Credit - *Reinhold Möller,* 2013. CC BY-SA 4.0.

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King William Rufus (From the Historia Anglorum, Chronica majora). Matthew Paris (c. 1200-1259) Credit - *Heritage Image Partnership Ltd/ Alamy Stock Photo*

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Westminster Hall in the Palace of Westminster, London. Public domain, Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Pugin, 1808 from *Ackermann's Microcosm of London,* 1808-11.

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Jacobite broadside - Westminster Hall during the trial of Lord Lovat. Public Domain, 1715, 1745-46, National Library of Scotland. Shelfmark ID Blaikie. SNPG. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Fig 12

Westminster Hall, Public Domain. Charles Knight, London (Volume VI), 1841, p.144. Source: From Old Books.

Fig 13

Map of London, Public Domain. Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum, 1572.*

Fig 14

1870 Cock Tavern Tothill Street pub ale stout shop bar house wagon horse façade Central London City royal urban London Greater. Credit - *Alan King engraving/ Alamy Stock Photo.*

Fig 15

Nineteenth century engraving from a drawing by Antony van den Wyngaerde (ca 1543-50). Public domain, Nathaniel Whittock, 1849. Copy of originals held by Bodleian Library.

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St. James's Palace and part of the City of Westminster. Public domain, Etching by Richard Sawyer of Wenceslaus Hollar's perspective of London. From The New York Public Library.

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The (former) Grey Coat Hospital (1698-1955) Greycoat Place, SW1 - Grey Coar girl statue. © Mike Quinn, 2 011. CC BY-SA 2.0

Fig 21

Public Domain, Buckingham Palace, J.Woods, 1837.

Fig 22

Public Domain, "*Inauguration du Monument de la reine Victoria, le 16 Ma*i": unveiling by King George V, May 16 1911. Published by L'illustration, 27 May 1911,p.122.

Fig 23

Western view of St James's Park, with Buckingham Palace in the background.Credit - *King of Hearts,* 2016. CC BY-SA 4.0.

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Illustrated London News (London, England), Saturday, May 04, 1861; p. 418; Issue 1087.

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British troops returning to France after leave ; boarding the troop train at Victoria Station, Richard Jack. 1916. Credit - *Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo*

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Public domain, *The Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey, November 1920*. © Imperial War Museum (catalogue no. Q 31492)

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Public domain, PD-US, the slum area known as Devil's Acre in Westminster, London. An illustration by Gustave Dore from 'Dore's London'.

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Plan of Victoria Street, Illustrated London News September 06, 1851; pg. 275; Issue 514 and 515.

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Fig 32

University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, House of Fraser collection, GB 248 FRAS 313/1

Fig 33

Army and Navy Co-operative Society Ltd Price List, 1908. University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, House of Fraser collection, GB 248 FRAS313/17.

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Fig 35

The Building News and Engineering Journal, Vol. 29, 1875

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Fig 37

The Chapel of St George and the English Martyrs at Westminster Cathedral, London, United Kingdom
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Chorister at Westminster Cathedral School

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Some Further Reading

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This is the second book Clive Aslet has written for Wild Research. The other, *Strands of History: Northbank Revealed* examines the history of the Northbank and unpicks the stories of the palaces, theatres, churches and hotels that give the area its distinctive feel.

If you are interested in working with us to produce a report or book, or in contributing, please contact research@wildsearch.org.

About the Author

Clive Aslet has lived in Pimlico for more than 30 years. Before discovering the charms of SW1, he studied History of Art at Cambridge, specialising in architecture. In 1977, this took him to Country Life, where, by a paradox of geography, given his home location, he became successively Architectural Editor, Editor and Editor at Large. He has published 20 books, including a novel (The Birdcage) and contributes regularly to newspapers, magazines and other media. His most recent project is a novel called The Usatov Diamonds, set in the Russian Revolution.

Clive is married with three children.