

u3a Bike Rides
William Blake tour
Tuesday 25th March 2025

The morning was bright but cool as we assembled at Brockwell Park near the Lido to begin our “William Blake” ride.



After the group photo we left the Park and headed towards Loughborough Junction. We used a variation of the route via Railton Road, Leeson Road, Somerleyton Road and Loughborough Park.

Then on to the café in Kennington Park, warm enough to sit outside for coffee. Here we learned from Niesje something about Blake.



He was born on in 1757 at 28 Broad Street (now Broadwick Street) in Soho, the third of seven children, two of whom died in infancy. Blake's father, James, was a hosier.

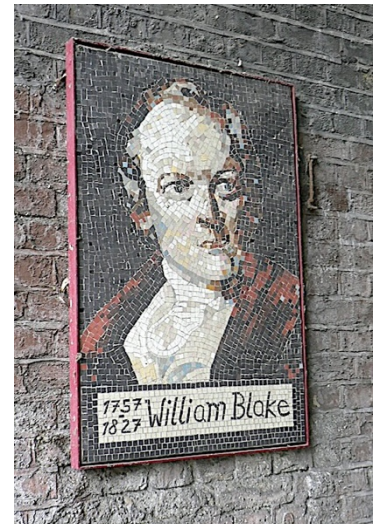
He attended school only long enough to learn reading and writing, leaving at the age of 10, and was otherwise educated at home by his mother Catherine.



Even though the Blakes were English Dissenters, William was baptised at St James’s Church, Piccadilly. The Bible was an early and profound influence on Blake, and remained a source of inspiration throughout his life.

Blake's childhood, according to him, included mystical religious experiences such as "beholding God's face pressed against his window, seeing angels among the haystacks, and being visited by the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel".

From Kennington Park, Cleaver Square to Black Prince Road and then to **Hercules Road**. This is where Blake lived and now there is a plaque on the house where his house/tenement once stood.



Nearby are three railway arches (**Carlisle Lane, Virgil Street and Centaur Street**) with Blake Mosaics along the walls. The tunnels are a bit dark and so we dismounted and walked on the pavement to look at and read these mosaics. More details are at <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/william-blake-mosaics-lambeth>

We crossed Westminster Bridge to Victoria Embankment and on to the Strand, where on the corner of King William Street and Agar Street Blake went to **Mr Parr's Drawing School**, demolished and now the Zimbabwean Embassy.



Further along the Strand is **Fountain Court**, near the Coal Hole Pub, (the building is being renovated and there is a scaffold). From here Blake could see the Thames now visible down a small alleyway.

The last building is the **Courtauld Institute** which was the original Royal Academy of Arts where he was a student in 1779.



The ride today did not include this venue, which is near King's Cross. At left is a stock photo of the Courtauld Institute.

Before leaving the area, we visited **Somerset House** (with no connection to Blake). In the courtyard is a representation of the "Salt Line" – which was a 4000 km "hedge" built in days of Empire in India from the Gulf of Bengal to the Indus River to deter natives from accessing the ocean and obtaining salt from the sea, avoiding payment of the Salt Tax imposed at the time.



We returned via Blackfriars Bridge and for lunch we visited the restaurant *Ev*, just off Blackfriars Bridge Road, before heading for home. A big "thank you" to Niesje for researching and leading this ride.

Here is a list of all the buildings Blake lived in in London; some are too far away or difficult to reach, so were not included on the tour.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-blake-39/william-blakes-london>

Riders Andrew Burke, Brin Heatley, Christine Noon, David Rosenfeld, Denise Davies, Gerry Gavigan, Jan Rae, John Clements, John Davies, Mary Burke, Niesje De Boer, Tacey Kobayashi
Ride Leader: Niesje.

Report by John: 27th March 2025