

**u3a Bike Rides**  
**Five Cathedrals and an Abbey!**  
**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2026**

The group met on a lovely day and set off for our first venue, **Westminster Cathedral**.

The route was one taken many times by the group and utilised the fantastic cycle lanes around Vauxhall and over Vauxhall Bridge to Westminster Cathedral.

This cathedral which was completed in 1903 and is at the heart of the Catholic faith in London is the home to many great works of art and beautiful mosaics, which many of the group went in to admire.



Cardinal Vaughan, who commissioned the building, wanted a large internal space to cater for Catholic population at the time, including the many Irish immigrants fleeing poverty and famine.

However, with limited funds and a tight timescale for completion the building was built in the cheaper material of brick and reflects the many grand industrial buildings of the Victorian age, such as mills and factories.



From there we made our way to **St John's Smith Square** for a coffee break. Originally a church, this Grade I listed building was designed by Thomas Archer and was completed in 1728 as one of the so-called Fifty New Churches.

It is regarded as one of the finest works of English Baroque architecture and features four corner towers and monumental broken pediments. It is often referred to as 'Queen Anne's Footstool' because as legend has it, when Archer was designing the church he asked the Queen what she wanted it to look like. She kicked over her footstool and said 'Like that!', giving rise to the building's four corner towers.

It was bombed during the Second World War, sold to a charitable trust and converted into a concert hall, with a lovely café. Refreshed after our exertions, we cycled to Deans Yard and then walked through it to **Westminster Abbey**.

The original buildings were founded in 960AD but the building we now see is from the reign of Henry III in the thirteenth century. Thirty Kings and Queens and 100 poets are buried there amongst the 3,300 in total.



Every coronation since 1066 has taken place there along with 16 weddings. As busy as always, we admired the façade, having seen a spectacular view from Dean's yard (see the photo) then rode on.

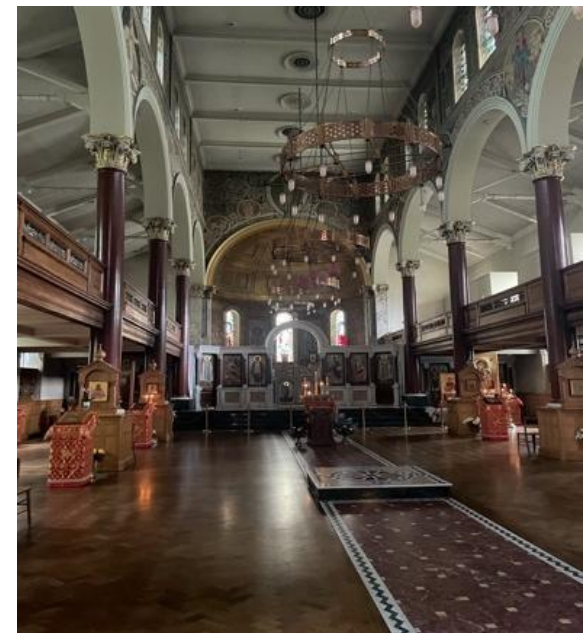
The route then took us alongside St James's Park up to **Buckingham Palace**, along the outskirts of Green Park up to Marble Arch.

It was a well- planned route, except it was the day of the Changing of the Guard and the area was full of tourists lining the streets.



Fortunately, although the roads were blocked off, we were able to cycle through.

Our route then took us along the outer road of Hyde Park and out at Princes Gate to visit the **Russian Orthodox Church**.



This was originally an Anglican Church dedicated to All Saints and built in the Lombard rather than usual Gothic style.

It was consecrated in 1849 and the parish covered much of Hyde Park but in 1955 the parish merged with the nearby church of the Holy Trinity, so the church in Ennismore Gardens was let to the Russian Orthodox Church and re-dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God – the Assumption.

It was purchased in 1978. In 2006, the then Bishop decided to leave the Moscow Patriarchate, but this was challenged in the High court which ruled against him, due to the terms of the Trust that had been laid out in 1944.

We were made very welcome during this visit and met a delightful woman who originally came from Lithuania.

Back into Hyde Park, we cycled along an early gas-lit street in London, lit because of the number of robberies that used to take place there. We re-traced some of our route the other side of Green Park but then used the cycle route around Parliament Square to link up with the north of the River Thames-side cycle way, along the river to **St Paul's Cathedral**.

Being another very popular site on the tourist trail, we stopped briefly to admire the building from the outside before cycling the short route to the Salvation Army International Headquarters Café, or a nearby park for our lunch stop. The café was surprisingly empty and locking up our bikes was easy.

After lunch, we cycled further along the north of the river and then crossed over London Bridge to visit **Southwark Cathedral**. This has been a place of worship for over a thousand years and was mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 when it was in the control of William the Conqueror's half-brother, the Bishop of Bayeaux. Following the dissolution of the monasteries it became a parish church in the Diocese of Winchester.

It was later transferred to the Diocese of Rochester and then to the Diocese of Southwark when it was formed. The current building was built between 1220 and 1420, although the nave was rebuilt in the nineteenth century. It only became a cathedral in 1905.

There was plenty of time for some of the party to visit before we set off to our final destination, **St George's Catholic Cathedral**. The original cathedral building was designed by the great Victorian architect Augustus Pugin, and at the time was considered the most important Catholic Church in England. It could seat about 3,000 people, and the building was 240 feet long by 72 feet wide. The church was opened by Bishop Wiseman on 4th July 1848.

Two years later Pope Pius IX restored the English hierarchy and St George's was chosen as the Cathedral Church of the new Diocese of Southwark, which was to cover the whole of Southern England. For the next half-century, until the opening of Westminster Cathedral, St George's was the centre of Catholic life in London. It was hit by an incendiary bomb in April 1941 and the rebuilt cathedral was re-consecrated in 1958. Once again, members of the group were able to visit, before we made our way back home.

**Acknowledgement.** Wikipedia

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**Ride Report:** Denise