

Places of Worship

London has an enormous number of historic and important places of Christian worship, of which we have only visited some of the more prominent ones. In addition, there have been many generations of Jewish people living in the city. It is now 'home' for an increasing number of Buddhists, Hindus and Moslems as well as those of other faiths. All need places where they can meet and worship. Many of London's churches were built with inherent architectural barriers of one kind or another, and our experience has been that in the past ecclesiastical authorities have been generally slow in providing ramps, lifts and accessible toilets. With encouragement from the DDA, many more places have provided step-free entry routes, and barriers to access have been removed. There are, of course, still some remaining challenges, and not everywhere can be made totally 'accessible' without disproportionate cost. Most places of worship provide an induction loop for their main activities, though often not for smaller meetings.

Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral, St James's Piccadilly and St Bartholomew-the-Great provide sharp contrasts in style and beauty, as do the Bevis Marks synagogue, the London Central Mosque, and the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission Temple. All are well worth visiting.

We will add to the list here as we visit more places, putting the details on our website under *Updated information*. This will be mainly sites of historic or architectural interest and importance.

If churches are your special interest, get a copy of *London's Churches and Cathedrals* by Stephen Humphrey (Author) and James Morris (Photographer), published by New Holland. Nearly 50 churches are described in detail, with some brilliant photos.

There's an interesting overview in *London's 100 best churches*, published in 2010, and with its own website www.londons100bestchurches.co.uk. While most of the churches are Anglican, 17 Roman Catholic ones are included, together with a Lutheran, Baptist and a Methodist chapel. There's also *The visitor's Guide to the City of London Churches* by Tony Tucker, published by The Horizon Press in 2010.

Apparently there were more than a hundred churches in London in the 16thC, of which 80 were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. Fifty-one were subsequently rebuilt under the direction of Sir Christopher Wren. More churches, some outside the City, were built in the Regency period, to designs by John Nash.

Note that some of the smaller churches are locked during the day, especially those in the city. If you want to see a particular church, it would be worth phoning in advance. *Friends of the City Churches* have a useful website www.london-city-churches.org.uk which includes details about both services and opening times (where applicable). It does not include access details.

Reflecting the fact that both Londoners and visitors to the city have a wide variety of belief and practice, we have included descriptions of some of the more prominent mosques, synagogues and temples. Note also the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, and the London Buddhist Centre which provide opportunities for joining in discussion and meditation. Both are described briefly. There's an extended list of places of worship in London on the website www.4london.info/londoninformationplacesofworship.htm and the list reflects the way in which various immigrant communities have established churches, mosques, synagogues and temples, in which to share worship and to provide a cultural meeting point.

Abbeys & Cathedrals

St Paul's Cathedral

The Chapter House, St Paul's Churchyard, EC4M 8AD

Tel: 020 7246-8350 RecM: 020 7246-8348

website: www.stpauls.co.uk e-mail: reception@stpaulscathedral.org.uk

Christopher Wren's masterpiece still dominates London's skyline. It is located on top of one of London's few hills, Ludgate Hill. It can be reached from the South Bank across the Millennium Bridge via a relatively gentle slope. Blackfriars is the nearest 'accessible' tube station, and Bank is at the end of the accessible DLR. Enquiries about parking for BB holders should be made to the Chapter House.

It is a church with a regular pattern of worship, and with some special events during the year for which you will need a ticket, often by invitation only.

The building is open for visitors almost every day, except Sundays.

Significant admission charge, except for services.

Access information is quite difficult to find on the website, but once on the page the information is good. It is found via: *Visits & Events* → *Getting here* →

Accessibility

A considerable amount of work has been done to make the building more accessible, and this is discussed in the Spring 2010 edition of *Access by Design* published by the CAE.

The floor area of the cathedral is approximately 70m by 160m, and the crypt underneath covers some 30m by 100m. Following the audio-tour to all the commentary spots (CS) would involve a distance of roughly 500m.

The main west entrance has +10+14 steps.

A step-free way in is some 60m to the right of these stairs. Go along the south side of the cathedral, and find the door where the South Transept joins the Nave. To facilitate access, the area has been re-landscaped. This entrance is normally staffed from about 08.30 to 16.15, and the cathedral is staffed from 07.30 to 18.00. The ticket machine there only takes cards. If the door is shut, you can press the buzzer to contact a staff member to get into services taking place outside general visiting hours, although you may be wise to phone first *Tel: 020 7246-8320*.

A lift (D80 W130 L130) gives step-free access to both the crypt and the cathedral. This is staff operated, and there is good communication between staff members to ensure that someone can take you to the level you require. You may be issued with a special electronic fob/keypad to operate the lift, so that you don't have to ask every time you need to use it. An excellent facility.

The principal places where you should find a staff member to help are:

- just inside the door at street level;
- near the lift exit in the South Aisle of the cathedral; and,
- at what is called 'Crypt Gate' in the crypt. From the lift you turn left and left, towards CS13. There's a ticket check here, as entry to the café, restaurant, shop and toilets area is free, via -20 from the north side of the cathedral.

When we visited, there was a temporary ramp in place on the north side to facilitate improved access. This is particularly for groups who might include several, perhaps dozens, of wheelchair users. Proposals for a permanent stone structure require careful consideration and wide consultation. This was ongoing in 2012. The current temporary structure is intended to help the evaluation of the concept.

Groups should ask the Admissions Department *Tel: 020 7246-8357*, about using this.

On the **main cathedral floor** there is step-free access everywhere except to the Choir/Quire, where on the north side, there's a platform stairlift (W90 L110) to bypass +4, right by CS14. The lift can be self operated, or a staff member will help. It is fairly simple, although the controls are back to front from the aisle level. In the Quire there is -1 (unramped) to the choirstalls, but these are normally roped off. Behind the High Altar is the American Memorial Chapel. The current plan of this area in the *Visitor Information* leaflet doesn't show the access clearly, and it looks as though you can go from CS14, round past CS15 and into the South Quire Aisle, which you cannot do. The only step-free link between those Aisles is under the Dome.

A wooden structure with an altar has been placed under the dome, to bring the centre of worship nearer the congregation.

In the nave and transepts there are plenty of seats. There are also seats in various places in the Aisles, and throughout the crypt.

The crypt is reached using the lift (bypassing -38 from the main floor or -20

from outside). It contains a shop, restaurant and café. There are **wheelchair toilets (D80 ST75)** just inside the door of both mens and womens toilets. BCF are provided in the main toilet areas, but the one in the mens is very cramped and awkward, mainly because of the inward opening door.

You will find the tombs of Nelson and the Duke of Wellington in the crypt in a sunken area with -3 steps. If you go around the outside towards where CS2 is, there's a ramp down from both sides. Further on there is the Knights Bachelor and OBE Chapel at CS3. All can be accessed step-free.

On the north side is CS12, *Oculus*, described further below.

There are hundreds of narrow steps from the main floor to the various galleries: +257 to the Whispering Gallery, a further +119 to the Stone Gallery (outside), and then +152 to the Golden Gallery making a total of 528. Back in the days before health and safety dominated our thinking (many many years ago) the author remembers climbing a vertical ladder right up into the inside of the cross on top of the dome, and almost being blown away by the wind coming through the ironwork !

For those people who have difficulty climbing the stairs there's now "*Oculus: An Eye into St Paul's*", located in the crypt. *Oculus* is a 270deg (3-sided) film experience covering 1400 years of history. The chamber has four stone pillars in it and is just a space with no seating.

There are four short films, including a virtual 'fly-through' film of the dome. You can also see filmed views of the City from the outside galleries.

There's an induction loop covering the main part of the church, for services.

Southwark Cathedral

London Bridge, SE1 9DA Tel: 020 7367-6700

website: www.cathedral.southwark.anglican.org

e-mail: cathedral@southwark.anglican.org

The cathedral is situated beneath and to the SW of London Bridge. Though much restored, the building retains its traditional Gothic style. Shakespeare's brother Edmond is buried here. There are -22 steps down to the cathedral precincts from the bridge.

The entrance can be reached step-free from Borough Market, if approached from the SW corner of the church, along Cathedral Street by the junction with Winchester Walk. There's a ramp to the right to bypass -6. The entrance itself is step-free although there are some slightly difficult doors en route.

A great deal of thought has gone into making the facilities accessible, including the attached building on the north side.

Inside some 70% is step-free. The Ambulatory is reached via +1 + 3 on the right side. The first step is permanently ramped, and there are portable ramps available to get up the others. The shop and refectory on the north side are accessed via + 7 but with a platform lift (D120 L200) to bypass them. The platform lift has an unusual control system. There's a conventional wall button, but to open the door

you need to press a release button and at the same time pull the bar on the top of the door. On arrival you need to use the release button on the outside of the door, and push at the same time (!).

Both the shop and café are step-free. The refectory/café is reached using a ramped passage outside the shop. It can also be approached step-free from Montague Close (approached from Tooley Street under the bridge), over a partly cobbled courtyard and a partly cobbled route. There's a large attractive area outside the refectory, with tables there during the summer.

Wheelchair toilet (D70+ ST70+ NKS) with BCF, near the top of the platform lift. A key can be borrowed from inside the bookshop. There's a second **wheelchair toilet (D70+ ST70+ NKS)** in the basement, reached by a lift (D70 W110 L140) next to the refectory. This also goes to upstairs meeting rooms. Induction loop in the church.

Westminster Abbey

The Chapter Office, 20 Dean's Yard, SW1P 3PA Tel: 020 7222-5152

website: www.westminster-abbey.org e-mail: info@westminster-abbey.org

The abbey church is used for many national occasions and royal events. It also has the tombs and monuments of hundreds of famous people.

It is a church with a regular pattern of worship, and there are some special events during the year for which you will need to get a ticket. The building is open for general visitors almost every day, except Sundays, when there are services. Significant admission charge, except for services. The College Garden is only open on certain days. Parking is sometimes available for BB holders, but you need to ring and ask. Westminster underground station about 500m away is 'accessible'.

The visitors entrance to the Abbey is approached from Parliament Square, alongside St Margaret's church, and through the North door. It is step-free. Some areas of the Abbey are unavoidably challenging and/or inaccessible, to wheelchair users - in particular the Lady Chapel, the Chapter House and the links between the Abbey church and the Cloisters. As a result, the Abbey offers free admission to wheelchair users, and to a companion.

While people can roam freely inside the Abbey, there is a well planned tour linked to an audio guide. If you want to be able to watch the videos while listening to the commentary, you can ask for a headset. On entry you get a map of the tour route with numbered commentary spots (CS). It takes you first to the west end of the church. After the grave of the Unknown Warrior, representing the fallen from the World Wars and other conflicts, it leads you down the centre of the Nave. You then go through the Quire and around the Ambulatory to Poets Corner. Several of the side chapels have 1 or 2 steps, and in some cases narrow entrances. To get to Henry VII's Lady Chapel there are 12+2+1 steps, which are wide and straight, with handrails.

The plan doesn't (currently) mark all the steps which you will encounter during a visit. In particular the -5 steps into the cloisters area, and the +5 to get back into the nave. Nor are the -3 into the Abbey Museum shown.

Once inside, much of the ground level is flat with occasional uneven surfaces over flagstones. The distance involved in a visit to the church is approaching 400m with a further 300m around the Cloisters. There are seats both in the main Nave and near Poet's Corner (where there are monuments to many of the countries greatest poets). Off Poet's Corner, there's a small toilet block, which includes a **wheelchair toilet (D85 ST120)** with BCF. It is located between CS18 and CS19 on the map.

The conventional route out takes you past the Coronation Chair and through the Great West Door where there are -2-1 steps with no handrails, followed by a cobbled area. A portable ramp is available. This route then leads through the shop. Alternatively, chair users can leave step-free via the North Door, where they came in.

There is, however, an additional area to visit, around the Cloisters. These lie along the south side of the Nave. The entry door is just past CS20. There are -5 steps, with handrails, from the doorway. If you are in an electric wheelchair, or with friends who cannot 'bump you down' those steps, then you will have to go outside. There's a slightly bumpy but step-free route through the Gateway off Broad Sanctuary, and into and through Deans Yard. This will add about 300 metres to the distance involved, and make the total something approaching a kilometre. You come back into the Cloisters, off which lie the Museum, Gardens and Café.

Disabled walkers might well like to borrow one of the wheelchairs available, in view of the distances involved, although they may be able to manage to steps into the Cloisters area.

Starting from the steps, going around the Cloister, you go first past the Chapter house which has +1(tiny)+2+7+1 steps to get in, with no handrails. At the bottom of the steps on the right is a door labelled 'Britains oldest door'. Further on is the Abbey Museum with -3 steps, and a handrail on one side only. Portable ramps are available to facilitate wheelchair access.

If the College Garden and Little Cloister are open, they are well worth a visit, and the route is step-free over some slightly bumpy surfaces. There are seats in the Garden.

The new *Cellarium Café* is off one corner of the Cloisters. Follow the signs, and you will find yourself at the top of -6 steps, with a lift immediately alongside (D80 W100 L130). The café is on two levels, level 0 and level 2 (used mainly at lunchtime). Along the corridor from the lift, at ground level, there's a spacious **accessible toilet** with BCF.

The conventional route for leaving is to go back into the Abbey Nave, via +5 steps, with handrails. Chair users can leave the Cloisters area via an exit leading back to Deans Yard, bypassing both the steps and the shop.

Induction loop in the church for services.

Westminster RC Cathedral

Ashley Place, SW1P 1QW Tel: 020 7798-9055

website: www.westminstercathedral.org.uk e-mail: chreception@rcdow.org.uk

One of London's rare Byzantine buildings, its red-brick tower stands in sharp contrast to the nearby Abbey.

Entrance +4 steps, bypassed on both sides by gentle ramps. Flat inside to all the main areas. Numerous side chapels have +2, but a portable ramp can be made available if you ask one of the staff. The book and souvenir shop are step-free. The café in the crypt is only accessible via +2-19-1 steps but there are plenty of alternatives in Victoria Street or Victoria station.

When we visited there was an exhibition of cathedral treasures in the upper left hand balcony. This is either reached using +50 spiral steps, or by the lift (D80 W120 L140).

The lift goes to the top of the Tower. Visitors are warned that in the event of malfunction there are 307 steps to get down, but nobody is prevented from using it (an excellent attitude!). The views are interesting, but would be very limited for a chair user who cannot stand at all. This is because of the design of the tiny balconies with stonework some 120cm high, with small holes at an angle through which to see. It's not easy to think of any way of getting around this problem in an historic building.

There's an induction loop in the church.

Central Hall Westminster

Storey's Gate, SW1H 9NH Tel: 020 7222-8010

website: www.c-h-w.com e-mail: visitorservices@c-h-w.co.uk

Central Hall is the 'Cathedral' of Methodism, used on Sundays for worship and at other times for conferences, meetings and exhibitions. It was built more than a hundred years ago, with its huge Hall (for more than 2000 people) on the 3rd and 4th floors. It also houses administrative offices and about thirty meeting rooms. It measures some 50m square.

It is located opposite Westminster Abbey and alongside the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre.

There are some cobbled surfaces as you approach the hall. While it was clearly not built with 'accessibility' in mind, the management have gone to considerable lengths to ensure that disabled visitors can get almost anywhere. Using the website you can download floor plans, although these don't show the lifts and split levels very clearly.

The main entrance has +3+13 steps to a reception desk. There are then a

further +53 to the Hall. The steps can be bypassed by using the door at pavement level just to the left. This leads to two lifts (D80 W100 L200) which go to most floors, including the basement café and level 3 for the Hall. It does not provide a step-free route to some of the meeting rooms on level 2.

There's an alternative ramped entrance near the corner between Tothill Street and Matthew Parker Street. This leads to two other lifts, one somewhat smaller, and the other D100 W200 L400, giving access to other parts of the building.

Using the lifts, more than 95% of the building is step-free, although quite long distances may be involved. Two of the rooms on level 1 are accessed by a platform stairlift which bypasses +5 steps. The Broadbent room on the GF can be accessed using an open lift to bypass -3.

There are **wheelchair toilets**:

- on the LGF, near the café with a separate BCF;
- on the GF, accessed through the Broadbent room - and an **adapted toilet** (which is slightly smaller than our 'standard' size), near the Emmanuel room;
- on the 3rd floor to the left from the main lifts, and by the mens. With a BCF;
- on the 4th floor also to the left from the lifts and near the mens.

St George's RC Cathedral

Lambeth Road, SE1 7HY Tel: 020 7928-5256

website: www.southwark-rc-cathedral.org.uk

The cathedral, opposite the Imperial War Museum, was rebuilt after its destruction in World War II. Step-free entrance, then flat inside with plenty of space for chair users at the sides and front. Induction loop. There are toilets in the adjacent Amigo Hall.

Churches

All-Hallows-by-the-Tower

Byward Street, EC3R 5BJ Tel: 020 7481-2928

website: www.ahbtt.org.uk

An interesting and atmospheric church, offering the opportunity of doing some brass rubbing. Pepys watched the Great Fire from its tower. Recently built annexes called the Queen Mother's Building mean that there are three step-free entrances.

Entering via the main doors on the north side, there's a +1cm ridge, and a ramp with sharp turns, to bypass the -3 steps. Probably the easiest way in is from Byward Street, via a shallow 20m long ramp into *The Kitchen* café/restaurant, on the east (Tower) side of the church. From here it is ramped into the church, bypassing +2. On the south side from Tower Place, the first entrance involves +1+2 but if you go through the double wooden doors under an arch in the wall, there is a step-free route.

The **Brass Rubbing Centre** is a friendly spot inside, at the west end of the church, with tables at a suitable height for most chair users, and brasses mounted on mobile plinths which you can put on your knees. There are sections of the Undercroft with some Roman remains down -18 or -12.

Wheelchair toilet (D80 ST80) near *The Kitchen*, and just after the end of the ramp.

Brompton Oratory (The London Oratory)

Brompton Road, SW7 2RP Tel: 020 7808-0900

website: www.bromptonoratory.com

A quiet and attractive church with a stunning interior, located almost next to the V&A Museum.

Entrance +6+1 steps. If you go about 30m down the side of the church on the left, there's a ramp to an alternative entrance. If the door is locked, ask at the house, or ring the bell which is set in the wall by the drainpipe, and near the bottom of the ramp.

It is mainly step-free inside.

City Temple

Holborn Viaduct, EC1A 2DE Tel: 020 7583-5532

website: www.city-temple.com e-mail: enquiries@city-temple.com

The City's only nonconformist (free) church with regular Sunday worship, and an international congregation. The building also provides a conference centre. It is located about 100m from Holborn Circus.

Entrance +3 steps, bypassed through a side door, normally locked. The GF contains the chapel, church and the hall. The church has mainly fixed pews/seats with a few wheelchair spaces at the back.

A lift (D85 W85 L185) goes to all the floors, which contain conference halls and meeting rooms. On floor -1 there are -6 steps to the two meeting rooms.

Wheelchair toilet (D80 ST80) with BCF down a twisty corridor on the 1st floor, reached by the lift.

There is an induction loop in the church.

St Bride's

Fleet Street, EC4Y 8AU Tel: 020 7427-0133

website: www.stbrides.com e-mail: info@stbrides.com

A Wren church with strong journalistic links, about 500m from St Paul's Cathedral. Fleet Street entrance +1 step, but there is level access if you come from Salisbury Court and go down St Brides Avenue. Flat inside with **wheelchair toilet (D75 ST100+)** with BCF in the office area which can be used on request. The crypt (-20 with further steps along the route) contains remnants of earlier churches on the site, and a section of Roman pavement.

St Clement Danes

Strand, WC2 Tel: 020 7242-8282

website: www.raf.mod.uk/stclementdanes

Another Wren church, best known for its oranges and lemons. Blitzed in World War 2 and badly damaged, it has now been beautifully restored, and has become the RAF church. It stands on an island in the middle of the Strand, just past Aldwych.

Entrance +1 step with a portable ramp normally left in position. Step-free in the main Nave inside. The balcony is +25, and crypt -22.

St Ethelburga's

78 Bishopsgate, EC2N 4AG Tel: 020 7496-1610

website: www.stethelburgas.org e-mail: enquiries@stethelburgas.org

Following its destruction in 1993 by an IRA bomb, the church has been completely rebuilt. It is now a *Centre for Reconciliation and Peace* amongst people from all faiths.

The entrance and floor area are all step-free.

Past the small garden is the *Bedouin Tent* where people of different faiths can meet as equals, rather than as guests in each other spaces. This is the latest stage in the development of St Ethelburga's. It provides a place for new types of conversation, where people sitting as equals in a circle can discuss how to understand their differences, and develop shared values and strategies for collaboration in changing the world.

Wheelchair toilet (D75 ST85) at the far end of the building in the glass section near the garden.

All Souls Langham Place

2 All Souls Place, WIB 3DA Tel: 020 7580-3522

website: www.allsouls.org e-mail: info@allsouls.org

Opposite Broadcasting House at the top end of Regent Street, the church is often used as a recording studio. The +7 steps at the entrance can be bypassed by a ramp on the left. Inside, a lift (D75 W110 L140) bypasses +3 into the church, and also -18 to the lower floor which contains a meeting hall and an **adapted toilet (D70 ST65)**. Induction loop in the church.

St Bartholomew-the-Great

West Smithfield, EC1A 7HW (parish office) Tel: 020 7606-5171

website: www.greatstbarts.com e-mail: admin@greatstbarts.com

Apart from the Tower Chapel, this is London's oldest church, with Norman arches and a triforium. There are twelve BB spaces around the outside, near the hospital entrance. Admission charge.

The main entrance is 50m along a passage at the end of Little Britain, just off the West Smithfield roundabout. You go under an archway, and down a slight slope.

Immediately to your right is a ramp leading down into a grassed area, with some seats and shade. Potentially good for a picnic. As you go into the church there are two small steps –1[3cm]–1[4cm]. Level throughout with uneven surface, except for the Chapel (+1) where the video is shown, with +4 to an upper level. The Cloister café/bar is just to the right of the entrance. **Tardis-type wheelchair toilet (NKS 24h)** on the West Smithfield roundabout just opposite the archway.

St Giles Cripplegate

St Giles Terrace, Fore Street, EC2Y 8DA Tel: 020 7638-1997

website: www.stgilescripplegate.com

Milton's burial place. St Giles is situated in the middle of the Barbican development, and there are lifts to get down from the Podium level. A ramp bypasses +2 steps at the entrance. Step-free inside.

St James's Piccadilly

197 Piccadilly, W1J 9LL Tel: 020 7734-4511

website: www.st-james-piccadilly.org e-mail: enquiries@st-james-piccadilly.org

On the south side of Piccadilly, opposite Swallow Street and about 200m from the Circus.

The poet and visionary William Blake was baptized here and it was supposedly Wren's favourite church. It has a lively and inclusive ministry, as you can see from the website.

There are –3 steps from Piccadilly into the churchyard, where small fairs are frequently held, and a further +2 into the church itself. Both these sets of steps are normally ramped. The ramp is W68 at its narrowest. The surface in the churchyard is slightly uneven.

There are +2+2 (not ramped) from Jermyn Street. Step-free inside the church to about 80%, although there are box pews (limiting where a chair user can sit for concerts) and there are steps up to the gallery.

The café, at the west end of the church, has +1 small step from the churchyard. There's a **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST75 NKS)** with BCF by the Jermyn Street side. This is kept locked during the day, because of misuse, and the duty verger has the key. The NKS lock is normally operational when there are concerts or events.

The website is forthright about limitations of access to the Rectory, Church Hall and Garden, but says that *"We have plans to provide full access to all parts of the church. In the meantime we encourage anyone with limited mobility to contact us to discuss what provision can be made for specific events"*. A very friendly and positive attitude.

St John's Waterloo

Waterloo Road, SE1 8TY Tel: 020 7633-9819

website: www.stjohnswaterloo.org

Located on the big roundabout at the end of Waterloo Bridge. A ramp to the right of the entrance bypasses +3 steps. Small threshold [± 3 cm] at the main entrance door. Inside the church is largely step-free, and there's a **wheelchair toilet (D70+ST70+)** towards the front on the left side.

St Lawrence Jewry

Gresham Street, EC2V 5AA Tel: 020 7600-9478

website: www.stlawrencejewry.org.uk

The church of the Corporation of London, on the corner of Guildhall Yard (see Guildhall write-up in *Places of interest*). It has a fantastic ceiling.

Step-free entrance then flat throughout except for -2 to a small chapel. Induction loop.

St Margaret's

Parliament Square, SW1P 3JX Tel: 020 7654-4840

website: www.westminster-abbey.org/st-margarets

The parish church of the House of Commons, where Sir Winston Churchill was married.

The main entrance on west side has +3+1 steps. There's a permanent ramp at the north entrance. You may have to ask the verger on duty to open the north door (or you can ring in advance). Flat inside except for +1 to the information desk.

St Martin-in-the-Fields

Trafalgar Square, WC2N 4JJ Tel: 020 7766-1100

website: www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org e-mail: info@smitf.org

On the northeast corner of Trafalgar Square, at the bottom of St Martin's Lane. Often called the *Parish church of London*, it has a fine spire and portico, and dates from the 1720s.

Its facilities have been extensively modernised, and wheelchair access has been greatly improved. In the main church building there are box pews, which limits the number of places a wheelchair user can be accommodated. The gallery can only be reached using about +30 steps.

While the main west entrance has a minimum of +5 steps, there is a permanent ramp on the north side of the building (off St Martin's Place) leading to two heavy doors controlled by a large 'push' button at the top. The doors then open automatically.

Just inside these doors there's a platform lift (D80 L160), which bypasses the ± 28 steps to and from the crypt.

Alternatively **there's a new circular lift (D100 diameter200) outside** under a glass cupola and near the ramp. This leads to the **crypt** which contains a licenced

café, a shop, a brass rubbing centre and two **wheelchair toilets (D80 ST80)** both with BCF. In the café the surfaces are slightly bumpy as the flagstones and memorial tablets in the floor are very old. Brass rubbing is done on low tables which would be suitable for most chair users.

There's a second lower crypt area, accessed by another platform lift. St Martin's hosts numerous concerts and events, in addition to the church services held there regularly. There are usually at least four wheelchair spaces at the concerts, at the front of the nave.

St Paul's Church, Covent Garden

Bedford Street, WC2E 9ED Tel: 020 7836-5221

website: www.actorschurch.org

This is London's chief church for those in the theatrical profession. It backs on to Covent Garden, but has its entrance on the other side, from Bedford Street (via Inigo Place). Outside there is a quiet garden with a good number of seats, some shaded, and this provides a nice spot for a rest or a picnic.

Access to the church is via +4 steps, bypassed by a steepish ramp. Inside it is flat, with traditional box pews, an impressive elevated altar and many plaques commemorating famous actors.

Temple Church

Temple, EC4Y 7BB Tel: 020 7353 3470

website: www.templechurch.com e-mail: verger@templechurch.com

Temple Church lies just south of Fleet Street, and north of the Inner Temple Gardens. We approached it from Middle Temple Lane, which was blocked by big gates at the Fleet Street end, but there was a pedestrian bypass W68.

It is one of the most historic and beautiful churches in London. It was built by the Knights Templar. This order of crusading monks was founded to protect pilgrims on their way to and from Jerusalem in the 12thC, and the Round Church was consecrated in 1185. It has restricted opening hours, and you would be wise to check the website, or phone before visiting.

Access is from the south side via two sets of double doors, and chair users may have to get the other side opened in order to get in. The church is step-free, though there are sections in the nave with boxed pews.

Mosques, Synagogues, and Temples

As we said in the introduction to this section, both Londoners and visitors to the city have a wide variety of belief and practice. Visiting different places of worship provides a useful way of learning about what others believe and do.

We have included descriptions of some of the more prominent mosques, synagogues and temples which are readily open to the public. We also mention the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, and the London Buddhist Centre which provide opportunities for joining in discussion and meditation. There are

many more opportunities, and we hope to add some of these to our website in the future under *Updated information*.

London Central Mosque (Islamic Cultural Centre)

146 Park Road, NW8 7RG Tel: 020 7724-3363

website: www.iccuk.org e-mail: info@iccuk.org

A fine building with a bronze dome, SE of Regent's Park, by the junction with Hanover Gate. The website has the 'times for prayer', answers to basic questions about Islam, and a list of all the Mosques in London.

CP available for visitors, controlled by security gate, beside which is the pedestrian entrance. For the casual visitor it is almost certainly best to ring first and ask about parking.

There are +3 steps to the main square, bypassed by a ramp 15m away, along the left side. To the right of the main square is the reception to the mosque.

Once inside, there is a bookshop to the right, and an enquiry desk to the left, as well as a prominent display, with clocks showing the five times of prayer - at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night. There's an excellent *Guided tour* booklet available at the desk. There is flat access to the bookshop, enquiry desk and main area of worship for men.

Visitors are allowed into the mosque even during the times of prayer, providing they show due respect and do not attract attention or get in the way.

10m in front of the main entrance are the Mosque doors. Inside these there is an uncarpeted (non-sacred) area where shoes must be removed before going on the carpet to pray. However, everything is visible from this area, including the fine carpet, chandelier and dome. Although women pray in a separate upper gallery, women visitors are allowed to look inside from this non-sacred area, provided they are suitably dressed. They are asked at the very least to cover their heads. Wheelchair users are allowed on to the carpet in the mosque if they want to pray.

For praying, the main GF part of the mosque is for men only. Women pray in an upper gallery. Both require *wudhu*, which is ritual washing before praying, principally of the feet.

There is a small lift (D75 W75 L100) which goes to the LGF, G and 1st floors to bypass the +20 steps to both the 1st floor gallery and the library and the -20 to the LGF.

The mens toilets and wudhu are on the LGF along with a café and restaurant, which has some excellent food. For disabled men there is a toilet available on the GF for washing. There is an unadapted womens toilet and wudhu on the GF.

There is a new administrative block, to the left of the security gate at the main entrance, contains a **wheelchair toilet (D85 ST110)** on the 2nd floor, to the left of the lift (D80 W100 L130).

The staff are friendly and welcoming, but it's a busy place.

Bevis Marks Synagogue

4 Heneage Lane, EC3A 5DQ (postal address only)

Tel: 020 7626-1274 (info) 020 7621-1188 (office)

website: www.bevismarks.org.uk

Built more than 300 years ago, it was located on a back alley as Jews were not (then) allowed to build on the public highway. It was also built to look like a church - from the outside - thus attracting less attention. The magnificent interior is almost unchanged.

The main entrance is through the iron gates on Bevis Marks, halfway between Heneage Lane and Bury Street. It is well hidden behind a modern building. Admission charge, and limited times of opening. Listening to one of the occasional tour commentaries is highly recommended.

Entrance +2 steps, but there's a step-free route through a (fire exit) door at the other end of the building, off Heneage Lane. This route goes past a spot W74. Male visitors are required to cover their head with a kippur, if they aren't wearing a hat or cap. The main body of the synagogue has its original oak pews, and is where the men sit for prayers. There's a gallery for women with +20, but if this is a problem, women can sit in the main part of the synagogue. It is a very atmospheric place.

In the attached hall for catering and for various events, there are -30 to a basement level. There's a chair stairlift to bypass these (for people who can transfer to a chair seat), and in the basement there's a **wheelchair toilet (D80 ST80)**.

Swaminarayan Hindu Mission (BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir) Neasden Temple

105-119 Brentfield Road, NW10 8LD Tel: 020 8965-2651

website: www.mandir.org e-mail: info@mandir.org

A new and spectacularly beautiful building which is the largest Hindu temple outside India. It is the first traditional temple in Europe and opened in 1995. It is commonly known as the **Neasden Temple**. Visitors from all religions are made very welcome.

It is located just off the North Circular Road in Neasden. Getting there by public transport could be a bit of a challenge. Wembley Park is an 'accessible' tube station, and Willesden Junction on the *Overground* is also 'accessible'. Both are about 1.5km away, so it's a bus or taxi job. Getting back you would almost certainly have to phone a cab (or pre-book a minicab).

There is parking in the school CP just across the road from the temple entrance, with 9 BB spaces.

It is highly preferable (in terms of both understanding the work of the temple and of seeing the shrines) to come during *Murti Darshan* between 09.00 and 11.00; 11.45 and 12.15 or 16.00 and 18.00. You might be wise to check the times.

Murti Darshan means being/sitting in the presence of a deity in the manifest form

of an image (Murti) - thereby coming to see and feel, and to be seen and touched by it, to exchange looks with it (the meaning of Darshan). This practice and language has similarities with the use of icons in the Eastern Orthodox Christian church.

Visitors are expected to dress modestly, and are not allowed to bring in bags, nor to take photographs. Security is quite tight, almost airport style, but more friendly. A visit involves walking a total of something approaching 400-500m from the CP. From the courtyard where you come in there are +3 steps, bypassed on either side by a ramp. At the door there's the security check. After that, men go to the left to take their shoes off while women go to the right.

The toilets are by the entrance with a wheelchair cubicle (D80 ST80) with BCF in both the mens and womens loos. It was the third cubicle in the mens, and the door was unmarked when we visited. It also had no handle to assist opening. The entrance foyer is richly carved with soaring teak columns. There is a small but quite congested shop there. The way into the temple Mandir on the 1st floor is via the blue carpet to the left of the entrance. There is about 30m of gentle slope. There's a well presented exhibition on *Understanding Hinduism* (small admission charge) which includes an excellent ten minute video about the building of the temple. You can time your visit to this to fit in with seeing the shrines, and we would recommend going round the exhibition first if possible.

A lift (D85 W105 L160) bypasses the ±27 steps to the Mandir which contains stunning white carvings, an amazing dome and the various sacred (and colourful) shrines.

There is much more information on www.swaminarayan.org which explains the origins of the Swaminarayan movement and its inspiration.

The **London Peace Pagoda**

On the riverfront in Battersea Park, it is a magnificent structure with gold tableaux depicting the birth, enlightenment, preaching and death of the Buddha. There are +14 steps to the walkway around it, but you can see perfectly well from ground level, and also from across the river.

To find out more about Buddhism, contact the:

London Buddhist Centre

51 Roman Road, Bethnal Green, E2 0HU Tel: 0845 458-4716

website: www.lbc.org.uk e-mail: info@lbc.org.uk

They provide drop-in meditation classes and introductory courses about Buddhism.

We were told that apart from one reception room which has a raised floor (with a portable ramp available) the entire place is wheelchair accessible. We were told that there are two accessible toilets, a lift to access the basement, and hearing enhancement systems at reception and in all the teaching rooms.

An interesting centre for meditation is the:

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

Global Co-operation House, 65 Pound Lane, Willesden NW10 2HH

Tel: 020 8459-1400 website: www.bkwsu.org.uk e-mail: london@bkwsu.com

The international centre for Brahma Kumaris was opened in 1991. It is a relatively modern movement originating from the 1930s with an emphasis on meditation and spiritual development. The London HQ is located in a modern office block in the NW.

Courses run daily, weekly, or more long term.

UGCP on Pound Lane with 22 spaces of which only 4 are not on a steepish incline.

The main entrance and GF are flat. A lift (D80 W110 L130) gives step-free access to all other floors. The seven floors contain numerous rooms, including a seminar room and an auditorium.

Wheelchair toilet (D85 ST90) on the GF, and another (**D85 ST85**) on the 3rd floor.