**Seven Dials and UCL Museums**

9.15    Meet at Tunbridge Wells station to catch the 09.39 to Charing Cross.  You have the option (see below) to return to Charing Cross on foot, by bus or tube.  If it’s the last one, you may wish to get a travel card.  This train may leave from platform 2, so please give yourself enough time to get over the footbridge.

10.36  Arrive Charing Cross and walk over to St Martin’s Crypt for a coffee and loo stop.  In case you’re tempted by their pastries, I’ll warn you that we’re having an early lunch.

11.05  Walk up St Martin’s Lane towards Seven Dials, where we will spend some time exploring the area.  There are lots of places to eat, so I suggest we do our own thing for lunch.

12-1    Lunch and then rendezvous at the sundials at 1oc

1-1.30 Walk up to Prince’s Circus, crossing New Oxford St and walk up Bloomsbury Rd, with Bedford Square on our left and the British Museum on our right, stopping for a quick look at Senate House.

1.30    UCL Petrie museum of Egyptian Archaeology, with a brief introduction from one of the curators.

2.20    Short walk through UCL, with a potential loo stop, to the Grant Museum of Zoology.

2.30    Brief introduction to the collection

3.15    Leave museum for walk back to Charing Cross, aiming for the 15.45 train home.  We’ll walk back along Tottenham Court Rd, past the GPO tower, and down Charing Cross Rd.  It takes about 20 minutes, so you have the option to catch the Northern Line to Charing Cross from Goodge St or the 14 bus from Gower St, but you have to get off at Leicester Square and walk the remainder.

**Background notes**

Until the time of James I, **St. Martin's Lane** was a country lane linking the churches of St. Martin-in-the-Fields and St. Giles-in-the-Fields. It was rapidly built up in the early 17th C. A narrow street with relatively little traffic, it’s home to the English National Opera at the Coliseum Theatre, the largest theatre in London, which was built in 1904 as a luxurious variety theatre and was the first European theatre to have a lift. The oldest house is currently no 31 built in 1636.

In the 18th-century St. Martin's Lane was noted for the Academy founded by William Hogarth and later for premises of cabinet-makers and "upholsterers" such as Thomas Chippendale, who moved to better premises at no 59 in 1753. (I can’t find any information about the carving above the door.) Mozart lived in lodgings in Cecil Court when he visited London as a child.

Above Browns the restaurant, we can make out that it was originally the Westminster County Court building.

**Seven Dials** was originally laid out by Thomas Neale, MP in the early 1690s, who cleverly laid out the area in a series of triangles to maximise the number of houses as rentals were charged per foot of frontage and not per square foot of interiors.

The names of the seven streets were chosen with the intention of attracting affluent residents; however some of the names have subsequently been simplified or changed because of duplication with other streets in London. They were originally: Little and Great Earl Street (now Earlham Street), Little and Great White Lyon Street (now Mercer Street), Queen Street (now Shorts Gardens) and Little & Great St. Andrew's Street (now Monmouth Street). Some of the original street signs can still be seen attached to buildings in the area.

Neale commissioned England's leading stonemason, Edward Pierce, to design and construct the Sundial Pillar in 1693-4 as the centrepiece of his development in Seven Dials. The Pillar was topped by six sundial faces, the seventh 'style' being the column itself. It was regarded as one of London's 'great public ornaments' and the layout and identity of the area revolves around it.

Neale aimed to establish Seven Dials as the most fashionable address in London, following in the footsteps of the successful Covent Garden Piazza development earlier that century. Unfortunately, the area failed to establish itself as Neale hoped and deteriorated into a notorious slum, renowned for its gin shops. At one point each of the seven apexes facing the Monument housed a pub, their cellars and vaults connected in the basement providing handy escape routes should the need arise.

The Thomas Neal's centre, previously a banana, cucumber and book warehouse retains the name of the original developer, whom Neal Street was also named after. **Comyn Ching Triangle**, a quiet square lying between Monmouth, Mercer and Shelton Streets was named after a local architectural ironmongery business. There has been a flower market on Earlham Street for many years, an offshoot of the more famous Covent Garden flower market. Neal's Yard, which is home to a number of independent eateries, has been the home of alternative medicine, occultism and astrologers since the 17th Century, all of whom were attracted by the sundial and the symbolic star layout of the streets.

More recent milestones in Seven Dials' heritage include two blue plaques, which mark two great landmarks in Seven Dials' colourful history. Above 13 Monmouth Street, a blue plaque highlights the location where former Beatles manager Brian Esptein ran his successful management company, NEMS. The plaque was officially unveiled in September 2010 by Liverpool’s darling and entertainer, the late Cilla Black, who was also signed with Brian’s company back in the day and became his only female vocalist. In Neal's Yard, Seven Dials' other blue plaque identifies the location of the Animation, Editing and Recording Studios of Monty Python, which read as: "Monty Python, Filmmaker, lived here, 1976-1987”. However, despite some redevelopment in the 19th and 20th centuries, many of the original buildings still remain and retain original features.

The original **French Hospital** was opened in 1867 by Eugene Rimmel, a perfumer, at No. 10 Leicester Place for 'the benefit of distressed foreigners of all nations requiring medical relief'. It moved to Monmouth St and was opened by the French Ambassador in 1890. It had 60 beds and had cost £22,000 to build.  The wards were small - at most of 5 beds each - and spacious and airy. Nursing care was provided by the Sisters of the Order of Les Servantes du Sacre-Coeur, who had received their training at Versailles.  In 1910 the Hospital was enlarged; patient accommodation was increased to 70 beds and an up-to-date operating theatre was installed. It was used as a hospital in WW1 and finally closed in 1992. The building is now the Covent Garden Hotel, with its entrance on Monmouth Street.

As we walk up towards UCL we pass **Congress House** in Gt Russell St, the home of the **TUC**. It was officially opened on 27 March 1958 along with the unveiling of the sculpture by Jacob Epstein, intended as a memorial to the dead trade unionists of both world wars.

**Bedford Square** is the only complete Georgian square left in Bloomsbury, built between 1775-80. **Gower St** had several famous residents including Charles Darwin. Notable ones are Millicent Garret Fawcett, a famous suffragette lived at no 2 and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded in 1848 in no 7.

**Senate House** was built in 1932 and was the tallest building in London when it was built. George Orwell’s wife Eileen worked there during WW2 when it was used as the Ministry of Information. It was the inspiration for George Orwell’s Ministry of Truth in his novel ‘1984’ and his novel ‘The Ministry of Fear’.

**UCL** has 5 museums that are open to the public during term time afternoons. We will be visiting the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology and the Grant museum of Zoology, but there is also the Art Museum, with 10,000 objects from the 1490s to the present day, Archaeology and exhibitions in the Wilkins Building.