

Our Mutual Friends

Dickens Walk #4: City & Clerkenwell



Start: Farringdon Tube Station on the Circle, Hammersmith & City and Metropolitan underground lines and British Rail main line.

- Leave the tube station into Turnmill Street and turn left; walk to the end and cross Clerkenwell Road at the pedestrian crossing to your right; in front of you is the **Clerkenwell Sessions House**, to which Mr. Bumble was going in Chapter 17 of *Oliver Twist*. He said to Mrs Mann, *“And I very much question,” added Mr. Bumble, drawing himself up, “whether the Clerkinwell Sessions will not find themselves in the wrong box before they have done with me.”*
- Go straight ahead from Turnmill Street, along Farringdon Lane, passing behind the Sessions House. Go to the end where, on the corner of Farringdon Road and Farringdon Lane is The ‘Betsey Trotwood’ pub on the left – named after David’s aunt in *David Copperfield*, although it is not mentioned in any of his books.
- Walk away from the pub up **Pear Tree Court** on your right. Oliver, Charley & the Dodger appeared from here prior to picking Mr. Brownlow’s pocket in Chapter 10 of *Oliver Twist*: *“They were just emerging from a narrow court not far from the open square in Clerkenwell, which is yet called, by some strange perversion of terms, “The Green;” when the Dodger made a sudden stop; and laying his finger on his lip, drew his companions back again, with the greatest caution and circumspection”.*
- Pear Tree Court ends at **Clerkenwell Close**, where the robbery took place. Turn right here and follow the road as it winds round past the church into Clerkenwell Green. Cross the Green and turn left; after entering Aylesbury Street, turn right down Jerusalem Passage into St. John’s Square. Cross over Clerkenwell Road again and go south down St. John’s Lane, under the old gateway to the Priory of St. John. At the end, veer right where it joins St. John’s Street and continue on to the Central Market buildings.
- Pass through the covered way opposite (called Grand Avenue) into

Smithfield Market, described in Chapter 21 of *Oliver Twist*: “It was market-morning. The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; a thick steam perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a dense mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs; the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping, and yelling; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng; rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses.” It also appeared in *Great Expectations*. In Chapter 20, Pip, newly arrived in London, went for a walk and reported, “So, I came to Smithfield; and the shameful place, being all asmeared with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me.”

- Go round the square clockwise, to pass the entrance to **St. Bartholomew’s Hospital**, mentioned in *Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and *Little Dorrit*. There are public toilets on your right as you approach the hospital.
- At the far side of the square, go left into Giltspur Street, alongside the hospital. Turn right at Cock Lane, under the statue of the boy marking the furthest extent of the Great Fire of London. Turn left at **Snow Hill** and see Snow Hill Police Station on your left. This is the site of the ‘Saracen’s Head’ Inn, where Nicholas met Wackford Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby*: “on that particular part of Snow Hill where omnibus horses going eastward seriously think of falling down on purpose, and where horses in hackney cabriolets going west-ward not infrequently fall by accident, is the coach-yard of the Saracen’s Head Inn....When you walk up this yard, you will see the booking-office on your left, and the tower of St Sepulchre’s church, darting abruptly up into the sky, on your right, and a gallery of bedrooms on both sides.”
- At the top of Snow Hill turn left beside the church, cross the street (called Holborn Viaduct), and turn right into **Old Bailey**. On the opposite side of this street is the Central Criminal Court, on the site of **Newgate Prison**, which featured in several of Dickens’s novels. It was described as “a grim stone building” in *Great Expectations*, where Magwitch died in the infirmary. In *Barnaby Rudge* it was attacked by the mob during the Gordon Riots: “And now the strokes began to fall like hail upon the gate, and on the strong building; for those who could not reach the door, spent their fierce rage on anything - even on the great blocks of stone, which shivered their weapons into fragments, and made their hands and arms to tingle as if the walls

were active in their stout resistance, and dealt them back their blows. The clash of iron ringing upon iron, mingled with the deafening tumult and sounded high above it, as the great sledge-hammers rattled on the nailed and plated door: the sparks flew off in showers; men worked in gangs, and at short intervals relieved each other, that all their strength might be devoted to the work; but there stood the portal still, as grim and dark and strong as ever, and, saving for the dints upon its battered surface, quite unchanged.” This was also the site of the court where Charles Darnay was tried for treason in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

- Walk to the end of Old Bailey, cross Ludgate Hill and turn left. Take the second turning on the right – Ludgate Square – through an archway. Follow this road round to the junction with Creed Lane and turn right. Almost immediately turn left again onto Carter lane and first right down St. Andrew’s Hill.
- Turn left at the end, onto Queen Victoria Street, and pass a sign on the large office building (Faraday House) on your left commemorating **Doctors’ Commons** – a society of lawyers practising civil law. This was housed in a complex of courtyards and buildings occupying the site bounded by Queen Victoria Street, Godliman Street and Knightrider Street, until 1865. Dickens worked here as a clerk for the lawyer Charles Fenton, in 1829-1830, and David worked there in *David Copperfield*, where it is described as “a lazy old nook near St Paul’s Churchyard” and “a little out-of-the-way place, where they administer what is called ecclesiastical law, and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete old monsters of acts of Parliament, which three-fourths of the world know nothing about, and the other fourth supposes to have been dug up, in fossil state, in the days of the Edwards.”
- Turn left up Godliman Street, cross over Knightrider Street and turn left at Carter Lane. 150 metres along on the left was **Bell Yard** (now New Bell Yard), opposite Dean’s Court. Dickens took an office here as a freelance shorthand writer in 1831.
- Cross over Carter Lane and go up Dean’s Court to come out opposite the front of St. Paul’s cathedral. Cross the street and pass in front of the cathedral steps to go through the stone arches of **Temple Bar** leading into Paternoster Square. This former gateway into the City was described in *A Tale of Two Cities*, when it stood opposite Tellson’s Bank at No. 1 Fleet Street. Removed from there in 1878, it stood in Theobalds Park, Hertfordshire, for the next 125 years, before being re-erected here in 2003. There are public toilets in the basement of the building to the right of Temple Bar. (If the square is closed, as it was when the anti-capitalist protesters camped outside St. Paul’s in 2011, turn right in front of Temple Bar, left at the end of the road, and 3rd right into King Edward Street.)
- Go through Paternoster Square to the side opposite Temple Bar and up

the pedestrian alleyway to Newgate Street. Cross over here and go up King Edward Street, to where ***Little Britain*** joins it from the right. From here up to the first opening into Bartholomew Close, there stood a row of buildings in Dickens's time, which included Mr. Jaggers's office in *Great Expectations*; the site is now covered by St. Bartholomew's Hospital, on the left.

- Retrace your steps to turn sharp left into that branch of Little Britain passed earlier, to see the sort of buildings which lined the streets around here in the mid-19th century.
- Continue to the end, turn right and go to the tube station, 200 metres to the south.

Walk ends at St. Paul's Tube Station on the Central Line.