

Our Mutual Friends

Dickens Walk #5: Lincoln's Inn and Temple



This walk should ideally be taken on a weekday, during office hours; at other times the Inns of Court are closed or have limited access. Alternatives for those times are given at the end of the relevant entries below.

Start: Holborn Tube Station on the Central and Piccadilly Lines.
Duration: Approximately 1.5 hours

- At the top of the escalators turn right to exit the station onto High Holborn. Turn right, and second right at the end of the row of shops, back on yourself, into Little Turnstile. Follow this round and turn left then right at the end, into Gate Street. This leads straight ahead into ***Lincoln's Inn Fields***.
- Stay on the right hand side to see ***No. 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields***. This was Mr. Tulkinghorn's house in *Bleak House*, where he was murdered. (In real life it was the home of Dickens's friend John Forster. Dickens is said to have based Mr Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend* on John Forster – in a very unflattering portrait.) Betsey Trotwood's lodgings in London, in *David Copperfield*, were described as being in “a kind of private hotel at Lincoln's Inn Fields, where there was a stone staircase, and a convenient door in the roof; my aunt being firmly persuaded that every house in London was going to be burnt down every night.”
- Cross the road opposite No. 58, into the park, and go straight ahead to the far end. The Gordon rioters gathered here in 1780, as described in *Barnaby Rudge*: “It was about six o'clock in the evening, when a vast mob poured into Lincoln's Inn Fields by every avenue, and divided--evidently in pursuance of a previous design--into several parties. It must not be understood that this arrangement was known to the whole crowd, but that it was the work of a few leaders; who, mingling with the men as they came upon the ground, and calling to them to fall into this or that party, effected it as rapidly as if it had been determined on by a council of the whole number, and every man had known his place.”

- At the far end, cross the road and turn right. (If needed, there are free public toilets up the side of the square to your left). Enter **Lincoln's Inn** through the gateway facing the Fields. This, one of the Inns of Court, features frequently in *Bleak House*. The **Old Hall**, straight ahead through the gate, was the Court of Chancery, central to the action in that novel. **At weekends and evenings, access to the Inn may be restricted to residents only. In that case, look through the gate and the Old Hall is straight ahead of you. Afterwards turn left up, the side of the Fields, and go through Newman's Row and Great Turnstile to High Holborn. Turn right here and pick up the walk when you cross Chancery Lane (see below).**
- Turn left in front of the Hall and pass the chapel, into Old Square. Go between Nos. 10 and 11, into the street called Stone Buildings. This appears to be a cul-de-sac, but there is a way out at the far end. Go up some steps on the right there, and turn into the alleyway which leads to Chancery Lane.
- Turn left at Chancery Lane and right into High Holborn. Walk for 200 metres and turn right into Staple Inn, through the archway in the half-timbered building. Cross the courtyard and go through the covered passageway straight ahead, into the gardens. The house on your left, **No.10 Staple Inn**, with 'PJT 1747' over the door, is where Hiram Grewgious lived in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Dickens wrote there that Staple Inn was "*one of those nooks, the turning into which out of the clashing street, imparts to the relieved pedestrian the sensation of having put cotton wool in his ears, and velvet soles on his boots. It is one of those nooks where a few smoky sparrows twitter in smoky trees, as though they called to one another, 'Let us play at country', and where a few feet of garden-mould and a few yards of gravel enable them to do that refreshing violence to their tiny understandings.*" The house was largely rebuilt in 1954. **At weekends and evenings, access to the Inn may be restricted to residents only. In that case, after leaving Chancery Lane, turn right at Southampton Buildings and left at the end to look through the railings into the gardens of Staple Inn. No 10 is directly opposite, on the far side. Retrace your steps to High Holborn and turn right.**
- Return through the Inn to High Holborn and turn right. After another 100 metres turn right through the gateway into **Barnard's Inn** (signs at the entrance indicate Gresham College). Go along the passageway, right and left through the first open area, and through another covered way into a courtyard. This was where Pip and Herbert Pocket first set up home in *Great Expectations*. Dickens described it there as "*the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together, in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats*". Pip goes on to say: "*We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it,*

and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so), that I had ever seen....A frouzy mourning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation.....while dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar – rot of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand besides – addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell...” At weekends and evenings, access to the Inn from High Holborn may be closed. In that case, continue to the next street on the right – Fetter Lane – and turn down it about 50 metres to an archway on the right into the side of the Inn, where large dustbins stand. This takes you into the courtyards described below, in reverse order. After this return to Fetter Lane and go right, then follow the route described below.

- Continue through the square, down the steps and diagonally across the next courtyard to exit onto Fetter Lane. Turn right and first right into Norwich Street; right at the end into Furnival Street, and left into **Took’s Court**. This was ‘Cook’s Court’ in *Bleak House*, where Mr. Snagsby lived and had his shop (now called ‘Dickens’s House’ at No. 15).
- Continue to the end and turn right into Cursitor Street. At the end of that go left into Chancery Lane and follow it to the end.
- Cross Fleet Street and detour right for a few metres to **No. 1 Fleet Street**; this was Tellson’s bank in *A Tale of Two Cities*. It stood opposite Temple Bar (which was removed in 1878, and is now located at the entrance to Paternoster Square by St.Paul’s, its old place marked here by a monument topped by a dragon). Tellson’s Bank was described as being, “*the triumphant perfection of inconvenience. After bursting open a door of idiotic obstinacy with a weak rattle in its throat, you fell into Tellson’s down two steps, and came to your senses in a miserable little shop, with two little counters, where the oldest of men made your cheque shake as if the wind rustled it, while they examined the signature by the dingiest of windows, which were always under a shower-bath of mud from Fleet Street, and which were made the dingier by their own iron bars proper, and the heavy shadow of Temple Bar.*”
- Retrace your steps to the end of Chancery Lane and cross back to the north side of Fleet Street. A few metres along on the left is Clifford’s Inn Passage, this leads to Clifford’s Inn where John Rokesmith took Mr. Boffin to have a quiet conversation in *Our Mutual Friend*. Dickens described it there as “*the mouldy little plantation or cat-preserve, of Clifford’s Inn, as it was that day...Sparrows were there, cats were there, dry-rot and wet-rot were there, but it was not otherwise a suggestive spot.*”
- A few metres further along Fleet Street, on the left, is the tower of **St. Dunstan-in-the-West**. David and his aunt, Betsey, came here to

watch the two figures strike the hour, in Chapter 23 of *David Copperfield*. Toby Veck (“Trotty”) had his visions in the bell tower of the church here in *The Chimes*.

- Go past the church, cross Fetter Lane and continue past two passages off to the left to turn left into **Johnson’s Court** (the name is carved in the paving stone at the entrance, between Nos. 165 and 167 Fleet Street): Dickens’s 1st story, *A Dinner at Poplar Walk* was printed here by the **Old Monthly Magazine** in December 1833.
- Follow this alley, twisting to right and left, until you come to Dr. Johnson’s house at 17 Gough Square. Turn right here, go to the end, past the statue of the cat ‘Hodge’, turn right then left at the end, by No. 11. Cross the courtyard diagonally, past the circular flower-bed and veer right down the alley back onto Fleet Street.
- **The Olde Cheshire Cheese** pub stands on your left. This is said to be the tavern where Sydney Carton took Charles Darnay to dine after the treason trial in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens was a regular customer here, and had a favourite seat by the fire in the ground floor restaurant. See the sign on the wall in the alley for names of other habitués.
- Cross Fleet Street and go down Whitefriars Street to the first covered passage on the left. This is **Hangingsword Alley**, where Jerry Cruncher lived with his wife and son in *A Tale of Two Cities*. “Mr Cruncher’s apartments were not in a savoury neighbourhood, and were but two in number, even if a closet with a single pane of glass in it might be counted as one. But they were very decently kept.” (Book 2, Chapter 1). **At weekends and evenings, access to the Temple, which is the next location to visit, is limited to one entrance only. In that case, continue down Whitefriars Street and turn right at Tudor Street. Go through the gates at the end into the Temple and turn right, up King’s Bench Walk. At the top, turn left and cross the car park to go through the covered passageway beside the Library. This takes you into the square outside Temple church, and the sights listed below can be approached from here, including Oliver Goldsmith’s grave, behind the church.**
- Return to Fleet Street and turn left. Walk 250 metres to a spot opposite the end of Chancery Lane. Turn left through the archway into **Inner Temple Lane**. This was the location of Mortimer Lightwood’s chambers in *Our Mutual Friend*. Continue down this pedestrian way until just before Temple church, on your left. Turn left here, following the sign pointing to Falcon Chambers. At the far end, under the railings, is the simple slab over the grave of Oliver Goldsmith – whose novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*, inspired Charles Dickens to become a writer.
- **The Temple** appears several times in *Barnaby Rudge*, *Bleak House*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and *Great*

Expectations. Dickens enrolled as a student barrister in the Temple, and retained his membership for over 15 years, dining regularly in Middle Temple Hall between 1839 and 1855.

- Go back to the pathway and pass the church on your left. In the square in front of the church turn right, go through the colonnade into Pump Court; on to the end, and through the passageway into Middle Temple Lane. Turn left and first right, beside Middle Temple Hall, into **Fountain Court**. John Westlock used to meet Ruth Pinch here in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; and in *Great Expectations*, Pip lodged Abel Magwitch in rooms in Essex Street, overlooking the fountain.
- At that time Pip and Herbert Pocket were living in **Garden Court**, approached down the steps beyond the fountain, to the left. Magwitch found Pip there when he returned from Australia. In Chapter 39 he writes: “*Alterations have been made to that part of the Temple since that time, and it has not now so lonely a character as it had then, nor is it so exposed to the river. We lived at the top of the last house, and the wind rushing up the river shook the house that night, like discharges of cannon, or breakings of a sea*”.
- Pass Garden Court and descend the steps at the end. Cross the car park towards the river and turn right at the Embankment. Walk 150 metres to Temple tube station.

Walk ends at Temple Tube Station on Circle and District Lines.