A

MORNING'S WALK

FROM

LONDON TO KEW.

By SIR RICHARD PHILLIPS.

A NEW EDITION.



"Here are ruins and desolation without antiquity! Here, even yesterday, it was all splendour and glory; yet the whole is changed into the scene of desolation before me!"—*Page* 24.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY J. AND C. ADLARD, 23, BARTHOLOMEW-CLOSE;
AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1820.

The title page from my copy of the "New Edition" of *A Morning's Walk from London to Kew*, published in 1820

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A Morning’s Walk from London to Kew

In 1817, Sir Richard Phillips published a book titled *A Morning's Walk from London to Kew*. The book is both a travelogue and a record of his philosophical musings. For me, the travelogue is by far the most interesting aspect of the book; I found the philosophy quite hard to keep up with. So, I thought that I would follow in Phillips's footsteps in present-day London to discover whether what Phillips saw along the way still exists and, if not, what is now in its place.

I first came across Phillips while I was researching my new book about how late Georgian and early Victorian London obtained its food. Phillips visits several market gardens along his route. I discovered his book from references to his descriptions of fruit and vegetable growing in what are now urban districts of London. Reading Phillips's book inspired me to start this fascinating side-project.

Phillips (1767–1840) was an English schoolteacher, author, publisher and advocate of vegetarianism. He wrote and published several articles on vegetarianism, and had been a vegetarian from boyhood. He describes his diet in a letter to a friend that he wrote in 1837: “The basis of my diet is potatoes, which I mash with the blade of the knife, and then mingle them with any other vegetable in season, as peas, beans, brocoli [*sic*], French beans, turnips, carrots, &c., and in times of scarcity with boiled rice, haricots, &c., seasoning with a little salt and pepper, adding a few drops of pure olive oil, or a little good butter. I then finish off a hearty dinner with some pudding, apple dumpling, rice pudding, fruit pie, &c”.

The text of *A Morning’s Walk from London to Kew* was first published between 1813 and 1816 as instalments in *The Monthly Magazine,* of which Phillips was the publisher. He states that the walk took place at the end of April, although he does not say in which year. His journey was probably made sometime between 1810 and 1812. Repairs to St James’s Palace following a devastating fire in 1809 were completed in 1813, but when Phillips comes across the palace, he despairs that it is still “in ruins”. Despite its title, the walk is unlikely to have been completed in one morning on account of his numerous stops to make observations, and his frequent interviews with the people that he met along the way. Phillips confirms this at the end of the book when he admits to cutting short his intended walk due to fatigue and “the fast-declining sun”. The full walk is about 13 miles [21 km] long. I followed Phillips’s walk in the summer of 2026.

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Part 1 – St. James's Park to Pimlico

Phillips begins his walk at Spring Gardens, where he encounters an assortment of beggars. He writes "I strolled towards St. James's Park. In proceeding between the walls from Spring Gardens, I found the lame and the blind taking their periodical stations on each side of the passage. I paused a few minutes to see them approach". As I walked down Spring Gardens, I only came across tourists; no-one was asking me for money that day. Today, there are sections of Spring Gardens remaining on either side of Admiralty Arch, but the arch was not built until 1912. The western part of Spring Gardens heads south from Cockspur Street towards The Mall. Cockspur Street now skirts round the southern part of Trafalgar Square, but in Phillips's time, what is now Trafalgar Square was the site of the Royal Mews. London's famous landmark: Nelson's Column, did not exist – it was not erected until 1843.

Phillips writes "In my way towards and along the Mall, I remarked that few were walking in my direction; but that all the faces and footsteps were earnestly directed towards London. […] These thousands walk or ride, therefore, every day to and from London, at hours corresponding with the nature and urgency of their employments." On my walk, The Mall was full of tourists walking in various directions, enjoying the sunshine.

Before Phillips reaches St. James's Park, he observes the Government buildings off to the left. He describes them as follows "These piles of buildings, ranged in a semicircular form, are imposing on the eye from their magnitude. There was the British Admiralty—the just pride of a people's defence against foreign invaders - but less worthy of admiration, if ever used as an instrument of ambition, or as a means of gratifying base passions." What is now called The Old Admiralty Building was officially known as the Admiralty Extension, and was built between 1894 and 1905. The Admiralty building that Phillips would have seen is called the Ripley Building which was completed in 1726. It fronts onto Whitehall, and is located to the east of the Admiralty Extension.

At Horse Guards Parade, Phillips saw "several bands of armed men, disguised in showy liveries, drawn up in array to exercise themselves for combat." When I visited, I was lucky enough to see several soldiers of the Household Cavalry, but they and their horses were stationary rather than practicing combat. Perhaps that is just as well, given the large crowd of people standing close by watching them!

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Phillips enters St. James's Park and encounters a milk fair. He writes:

> On my entrance into the Park, I was amused and interested by an assemblage of a hundred mothers, nurses, and valetudinarians, accompanied by as many children, who are drawn together at this hour every fine morning by the metropolitan luxury of milk warm from the cow. Seats are provided, as well as biscuits, and other conveniences, and here from sunrise till ten o'clock continues a milk fair, distinguished by its peculiar music in the lowing of cows, and in the discordant squalling of the numerous children. The privilege of keeping these cows, and of selling their milk on this spot, belongs to the gate-keepers of the Park; and it must be acknowledged to be a great convenience to invalids and children, to whom this wholesome beverage and its attendant walk are often prescribed.

There is a painting from 1801 by the artist Benjamin West titled *Milkmaids in St. James's Park, Westminster Abbey Beyond*. The painting shows milkmaids milking some cows, and people drinking the fresh milk that they had just bought. Westminster Abbey is visible in background of the painting, so it is likely that the cows were milked in the southeast corner of the park. Unsurprisingly, there were no cows or milkmaids in St. James's Park on my visit – so I had to make do with an ice cream instead!

Phillips remarks on the state of the park "I observed with concern that this Park presents a neglected appearance. The seats are old and without paint, and many vacancies exist in the lines of the trees. The wooden railing round the centre is heavy and decayed, and the appearance of every part is unworthy of a metropolitan royal domain". The park is in fine condition these days. The only unkempt aspect to the park on my visit was that the grass, usually so green and lush, resembled yellow straw on account of the prevailing drought.

Curiously, Phillips calls the lake in St. James's Park a "canal". However, if you look at John Rocque's map of 1746, it shows that what is now the curving lake with an island at each end was then a linear feature. The Royal Parks website tells us that, at Phillips's time of writing, it was indeed a tree-lined canal almost half a mile long, but "In the 1820s, the park got another grand makeover, courtesy of the Prince Regent, later George IV. He and architect John Nash brought a touch of romance and naturalness to the formality of St. James's. Nash replaced the canal with a curving lake and formal avenues became winding paths". That is exactly how the lake appears today.

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Phillips leaves the park at the western end, and heads towards Pimlico. He writes “The wall of what are called the Gardens of Buckingham House, form one side of the main street of Pimlico; but these gardens consist merely of a gravel walk, shaded by trees, with a spacious and unadorned area in the centre. The whole is the property of Queen Charlotte, and is inaccessible to a visit of mere curiosity.” Queen Charlotte was the wife of King George III; Buckingham House was an earlier name for Buckingham Palace. It only became the principal royal residence on the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne in 1837.

Geoarchaeologists at the Museum of London Archaeology have recently been investigating London's lost rivers. They conclude that the ancient course of the River Tyburn probably ran north to south through the gardens of Buckingham Palace where it splits in two – one outlet heading south towards Vauxhall Bridge, and the other heading east to Westminster. They suggest that there was “delta-like wetland” between the two branches of the Tyburn. The researchers note that “Westminster was formed by the rivers that surround it, rivers like the Tyburn that today sadly is hidden from view, bricked up and part of London's sewer system.” Phillips himself was trying to find evidence of the “Tye, or Ty-bourn” at the point where it crossed Stafford Row (now Buckingham Palace Road) but, like the modern geoarchaeologists, he discovered that it had already been channelled underground.

Long gone are what Phillips describes as “The water-works, to the left of the road, supply Pimlico and part of Westminster with water and, I may add, with smoke, of which it emits large volumes. [The works] consists simply of a steam and forcing engine”. John Rocque's map of 1746 shows that the pumping engine of the Chelsea Water Works was located at what is now the Clermont Hotel on Buckingham Palace Road. In 1824, the tidal creek leading from the Thames to the basin of the waterworks was transformed into the Grosvenor Canal by the building of a lock near the Thames. In addition to supplying water to the waterworks, the canal was used to carry coal and other heavy materials to the Pimlico Wharf, the site of which is now the bus station outside Victoria Station. The Chelsea Water Works abandoned the site in 1856 following an act of Parliament banning the use of Thames water for domestic purposes. Subsequently, the basin and the canal were filled in. The site of the basin and its wharfs became Victorian Station, which opened in 1860; the canal was replaced by the railway lines heading south from the station.

It is hard to image that parts of Victoria and Westminster, now so densely built upon, were marshland in Phillips’s time. He writes “It is singular that such a marsh should have become the focus of the government, jurisprudence, and power, of this great empire! Yet, so it is, the offices of Government, the Houses of Parliament, and the Supreme Courts of Law, stand

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on the lowest ground in or near the metropolis; the greater part of which is still the swamp of Tothill and Milbank-Fields; and the whole is exposed to the inundations of land-floods or extraordinary tides." What were Tothill Fields and Milbank Fields is now the built-up area between Victoria and Millbank.

Phillips writes "Belgrave-Place, lower and upper, proves the avidity of building speculations, which could thus challenge the prejudices against the opposite marshes." Lower Belgrave Place (now Lower Belgrave Street) is situated off Buckingham Palace Road, opposite the Clermont Hotel. Phillips's prediction that the land to the east would soon be built upon did not take long to come true. C. and J. Greenwood's map of 1828 shows that much of the land had already been developed by then, including the construction of the formidable Millbank Penitentiary.

South-east of Victoria Station towards the Thames used to be what were known as the Neat House Gardens, which are now the densely populated area of Pimlico. The Neat House Gardens supplied huge amounts of fruit and vegetables to London from early 1600s until 1825. The gardens were bounded by the tidal creek (now the railway lines) to the west, Willow Walk (now Warwick Way) to the north, Tatch Brook (now Tachbrook Street) to the east, and the River Thames to the south. In 1825, Thomas Cubitt bought the leases to the garden land from the Grosvenor and Wise estates, and proceeded to evict the gardeners. Cubitt soon began the extensive design and construction of buildings, squares and roads on the former market gardens. What remains today of Cubitt's development is designated as the Pimlico Conservation Area.

Next: Part 2 – Chelsea to Battersea

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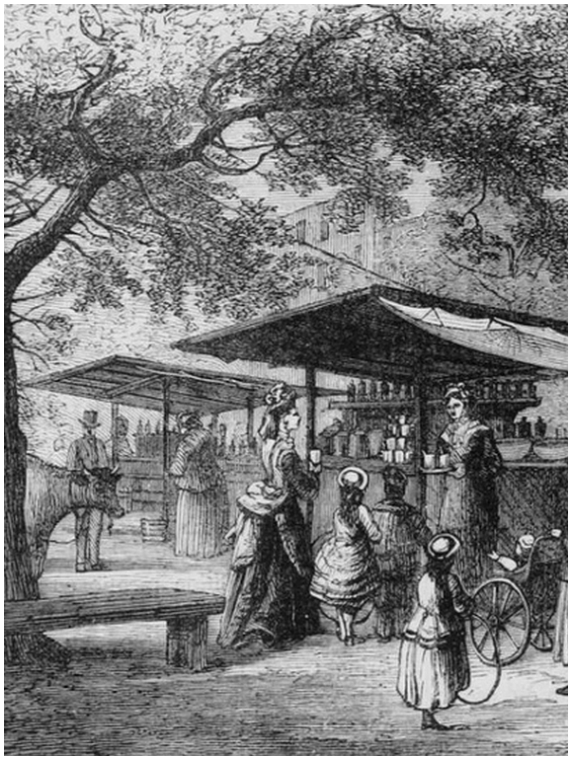
Walking down Spring Gardens from Trafalgar Square, heading towards The Mall – July 2026.



Household Cavalry parading in front of the Old Admiralty Building.



Detail from *Milkmaids in St. James's Park, Westminster Abbey Beyond* by Benjamin West.



Detail from “Milk Fair, St. James’s Park” from *Old and New London* by Edward Walford.

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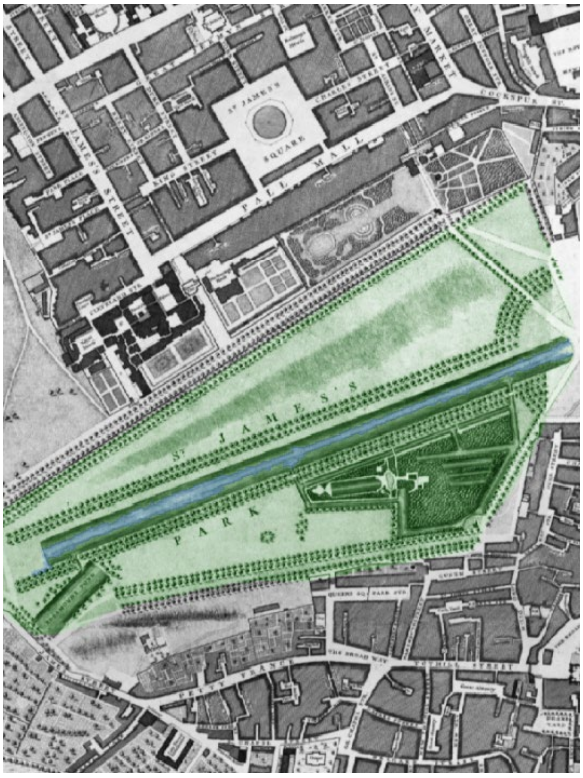
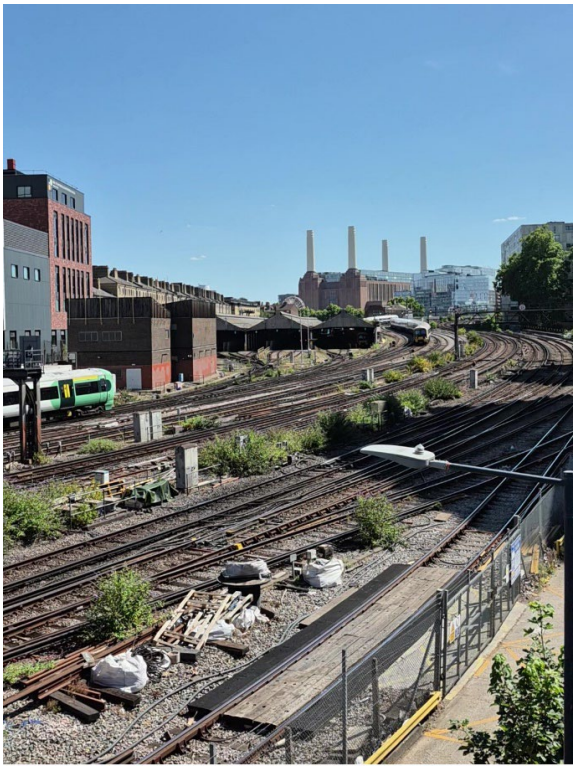


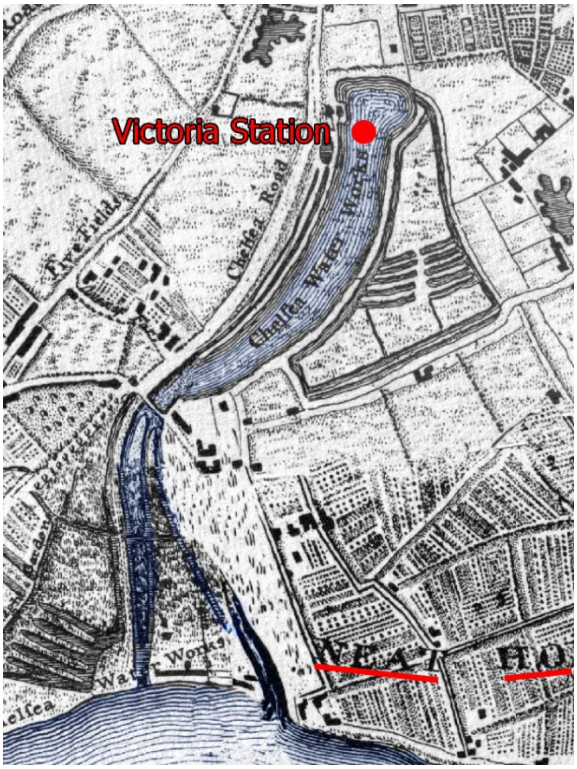
St. James's Park and its canal (highlighted in blue) from John Rocque's map of 1746*.



The curving lake and island (top left) in St. James's Park today; created by John Nash in the 1820s.



The railway lines heading south from Victoria Station, following the route of the old waterworks creek. Battersea Power Station, on the south bank of the Thames, can be seen in the distance.



Chelsea Water Works & creek from John Rocque's map of 1746* with the location of the future Victoria Station shown in red. Also showing the Neat House Gardens (underlined).

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ENDNOTE:

Layers of London is an excellent resource for charting changes in the topography of an area over time. I used it to identify the location of the site of what would become Victoria Station. https://www.layersoflondon.org