

# Hiding in plain sight

There are about 1,500 memorials in London, from the well known to the obscure. Carla Passino pays a visit to some of the latter on a route through central London

Illustrated by Fred van Deelen

**T**WO horses, a grey and a piebald, walk gracefully along Hyde Park's Dorchester Ride. As they glide northward, another horse comes into view, framed by the park's iron railings. But this one and the dog accompanying it have a touch of sadness about them, caught in the moment of leaving life behind. On the other side of a symbolic stone portal, two laden mules prepare to face the same destiny. The bronze group is a tribute to animals killed in war, one of London's poignant, but often-overlooked memorials, which tell stories of heroism, duty, genius

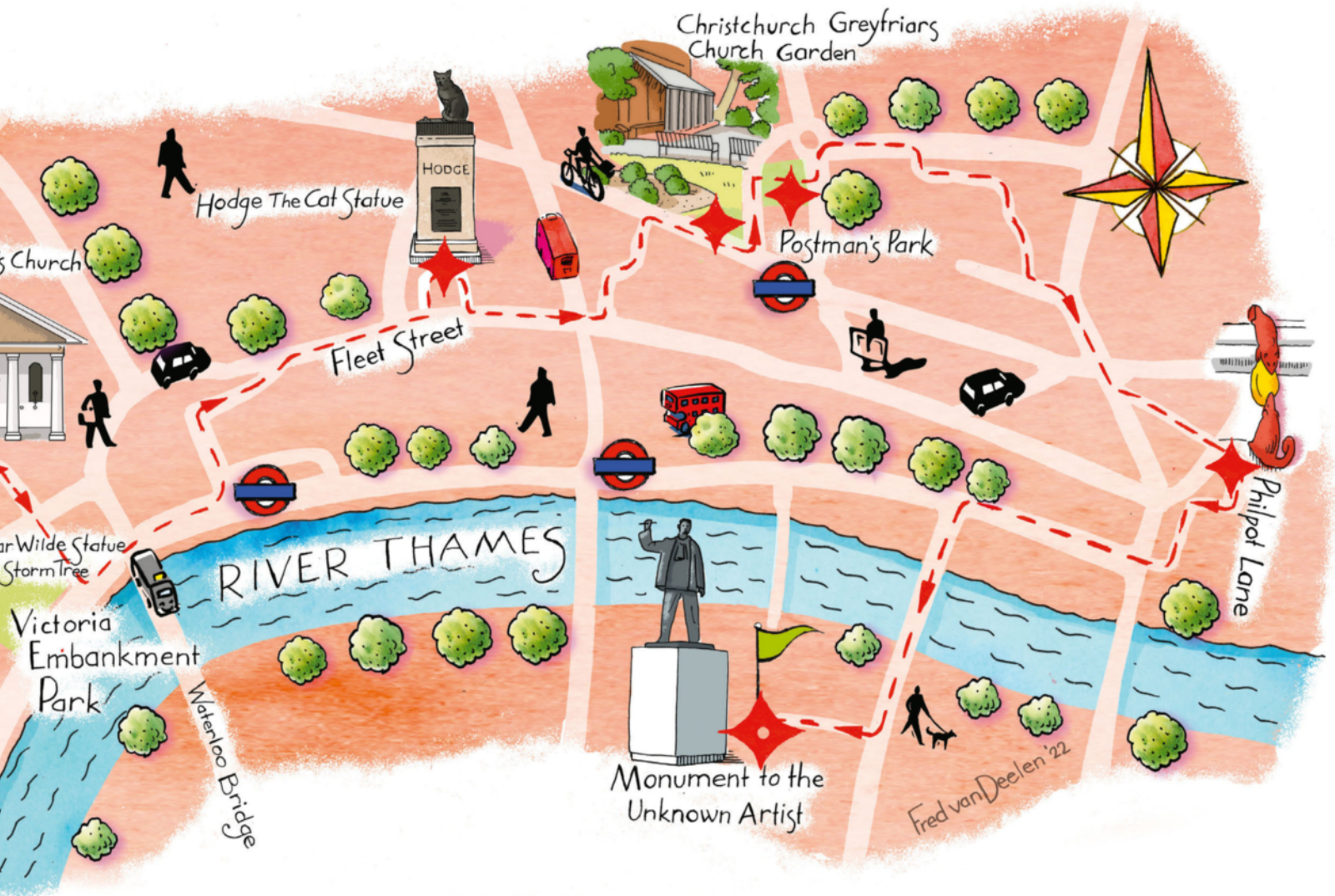
and enduring love, occasionally sprinkled with a pinch of eccentricity.

Sacrifice of a different kind is etched into the plaques of the September 11 memorial garden, opposite the skeleton of the former American embassy in Grosvenor Square. Bearing the names of the terrorist attack's 67 British victims, they are sheltered in a pergola evocative of a Greek temple, to which wood confers a pensive dignity. An engraving on the stone at the centre of the rose-festooned garden, under which is buried a small relic of the World Trade Centre, reminds us that 'for those who love, time is not'.

There's no epitaph on the Soho cholera memorial in Broadwick Street—a humble, handle-less pump that looks like ordinary street furniture—but it should have been 'determination saves lives'. Victorian physician John Snow mapped the cases and became convinced that the disease spread through polluted water dispensed by the pump. Other scientists dismissed his theory, but he eventually persuaded the parish council to remove the pump handle. The epidemic stopped and the seeds of modern epidemiology were sown.

Another tribute to genius stands in Leicester Square, but it's zany and light-hearted,





to suit the particular brand of human ingenuity it celebrates: film. Almost lost among the West End throngs, cinematic icons grace the square's rooftops and garden: Harry Potter flying on broomstick, Mary Poppins landing on the grass and, just off the garden's centre, stealing the scene from Shakespeare, a bronze of Charlie Chaplin. Commissioned shortly after his death, it is as much a commemoration of the man as of his art—thought to be only a little bigger than life size, it suggests how delightfully tiny Chaplin really was.

A second memorial to *The Tramp* star hides in a Covent Garden church, past the young oak outside Charing Cross station (a remembrance of the trees lost in the 1987 Great Storm) and Maggi Hambling's controversial Oscar Wilde bench—the playwright's almost melting features emerging from a granite coffin, cigarette in hand. Tucked at the end of two rows of roses, a quiet lull in the hubbub of Covent Garden, St Paul's turns its back on the Piazza, but remains very much a slice of the West End's theatrical

culture. Its walls are lined with tributes to everyone from Chaplin, Noël Coward and Vivien Leigh to Edna Best, who caused scandal when she remarried for the third time only minutes after having been granted a divorce from her second husband, and the most infamous performer of all—Irish comedian Charles Macklin.

### 'The epidemic stopped and the seeds of modern epidemiology were sown'

A pioneer of natural acting, Macklin ditched the comic interpretation of Shylock in vogue at the time to return it to Shakespeare's original. Unfortunately, he also had a vicious temper and, on a fateful day in 1735, shoved his cane in the eye of another actor, Thomas Hallam, in a row over a wig, killing him. Macklin escaped relatively unscathed from

this, with only a sentence for manslaughter, and his memorial, commissioned by his widow, Elizabeth, is surmounted by a theatre mask pierced in one eye by a dagger.

Far more stately is the cavalcade of statues along Victoria's Embankment Gardens, which honours Britain's great and good, from Thomas More and John Stuart Mill to Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Michael Faraday and the man who made the gardens possible, Joseph Bazalgette. But a burst of colour stands out among the bronzes: *Sandy*, one of the 19 corgis that have taken over London as part of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations and will remain in place until the end of July. Created by artist Sophie Malpas, the sculpture—a triumph of bold pink, yellow, orange, green and blue chosen to create a sense of joy—celebrates one of The Queen's latest corgis, its expression suggesting a hint of cheekiness.

The same devotion The Queen shows to her dogs, Samuel Johnson reserved for Hodge the cat. He fed it oysters, which he went out to buy himself 'lest the servants having that trouble should take a dislike →

to the poor creature,' according to James Boswell. Appropriately, this prince of cats has a memorial of his own outside Dr Johnson's house, at the end of an obscure alley, the entrance of which is disguised as a slender gap between two of Fleet Street's monumental buildings. Finding the statue requires sleuthing skills worthy of Sherlock Holmes, but it is well worth the effort: a very dignified Hodge, perhaps looking a touch smug, sits by two oyster shells brightened by the odd penny thrown in by people for good luck.

London is full of these small treasures, sometimes concealed, like Hodge, but more often screened by cars and the inattention that comes from familiarity. One such rises, in a perfect contrast between the soulless and the soul-stirring, opposite the Stock Exchange building: the ruins of Wren's Christ Church Greyfriars. Wrecked in the Blitz, it was never rebuilt and its former nave and aisles now burst with pink and white roses, purple geraniums and spikes of cat-mint, a memorial to mindless destruction and the sacrifice that so many endured then to secure our future now.

Almost opposite it, Postman's Park is quieter, greener and perhaps more austere than Greyfriars, befitting a place that honours

heroism in everyday life. Artist George Frederick Watts originally came up with the idea as part of Victoria's Golden Jubilee, but his suggestion found 'little or no notice', leading him to note bitterly: 'If I had proposed a racecourse round Hyde Park, there would have been plenty of sympathisers.'

### 'It comes across as a tribute to art itself and how people interact with it'

By the turn of the century, however, the plan had garnered enough support and the memorial was unveiled in 1900. Each of the park's 54 tablets is harrowing and uplifting at the same time, restoring faith in human nature: there's Alice Ayres, who died saving three children from a burning house in 1885; nine-year-old William Fisher, who lost his life to prevent his little brother being run over in 1886; and Leigh Pitt, who drowned in 2007 after rescuing a child that had fallen into a canal. The memorial is unfinished, allowing for more tablets to be added, although a decision was taken in 2010 to stop doing so to preserve its integrity.

Much more joyful is the *Monument to the Unknown Artist* in Bankside. Made by Greyworld in 2007, it's an animatronic bronze: cameras in the plinth allow it to 'see' what passers-by are doing and copy their poses. Although intended as a celebration of the unsung heroes of paints and canvas, it comes across as a tribute to art itself and how people interact with it.

A quick detour from this monument reaches the most obscure, yet most endearing memorial ever to grace the streets of London: it takes very good eyes to spot the tiny mice fighting over a chunk of cheese in Philpot Lane. Story has it that they were placed there by Victorian workmen to remember the little pests that had often munched their lunches, (or, in a darker take, two of their colleagues who had fallen to their death in a row over food that had instead been stolen by mice). Be as it may, the two critters have since become part of the Knowledge, the immense collection of information that London cab drivers must master to obtain their licence. It takes three to four years and a lot of work to pass the notoriously difficult test. Perhaps the mice of Philpot Lane are as much a monument to cabbies' perseverance as they are to famished little rodents. 🐭

## At home in Obscure London



### The Strand, £899,995

Set opposite Wren's St Clement Danes Church, this studio flat with balcony is a convenient *piéd-à-terre* for easy access to the West End, the Stock Exchange and the Royal Courts of Justice. Residents have access to a communal pool, gym and 24-hour concierge  
*Dexters (020-7833 4466)*



### Davies Street, £9 million

This 2,163sq ft apartment is situated in an elegant Mayfair development with 24-hour portage. It has a striking living and dining area with balcony, a contemporary fitted kitchen with marble-topped breakfast bar and three bedrooms, including a master suite with walk-in wardrobe.  
*Knight Frank (020-4502 9293)*



### Sumner Street, £825,000

Situated in the celebrated Neo-Bankside development, by Tate Modern, this apartment takes in views of the London skyline both from the sitting and dining area and from the double bedroom. The building comes with a 24-hour concierge, gym and landscaped gardens.  
*Savills (020-7456 6800)*