

Statue spotting in London

Melody Wren

Special to The CJN

Whether you're in London for the Olympics or to see the sights, keep your eyes open for the silent tributes to the city's history, heroes and culture in the form of statues that can be found almost everywhere you look.

Nelson on his column and Eros (Cupid) in Piccadilly Circus are probably the most iconic, but there are thousands more all over the city.

Here are a few of my favourites.

In Trafalgar Square, you can't miss Nelson's Column. But walk toward St. Martin-in-the-Fields and in the alley running beside the church, look for a black marble bench with a human figure on it. It's a striking and whimsical statue called *Conversation with Oscar Wilde*. Sit on the bench and chat with him for a while, but don't join the crew of ragamuffins who keep stealing his cigarette.

Back in Trafalgar Square, look for the four plinths, three of which have statues of former war heroes. The fourth plinth is often empty, but installations are commissioned for it in honour of special occasions. Check to see if there's one for the Olympics.

One that resonated with me on a visit in 2005 was a self-portrait by sculptor and thalidomide victim Alison Lapper depicting her in the late stages of her pregnancy.

There are a number of kings and queens, and replicas of Queen Victoria number in the dozens. Victoria and Albert are ubiquitous, and one of my favourites is the young Victoria in front of Kensington Palace, sweet and innocent, looking into her future.

The Albert Memorial in Hyde Park is glitzy and over the top, but the details showing the four quadrants of the British Empire on each corner of the statue are worth examining closely.

While you're in the area of Kensington and Hyde Park, look for Peter Pan playing mischievously in a small garden on the south side of the park.

In the King's Cross area, look for the imposing statue of Sir Isaac Newton in the courtyard of the British Library, based on a William Blake painting. On the mezzanine level



The Women of World War II in Whitehall

of St. Pancras station is former poet laureate John Betjeman looking as if he has just missed his train.

If you want to travel further afield, go to Kew Gardens, a stunning place well worth a half-day visit for the gardens alone at almost any time of the year, but they're particularly lovely in the spring and in the snow.

As you come through the main gate, head 45 degrees left off the path and into the trees. In a small glade, you'll come across one of my favourites, the *Wounded Angel*, a sculpture I have visited many times. I am giving the instructions where to find it, because last time we were there, the staff



Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill have a chat in Mayfair, London. [Melody Wren photos]

didn't know where it was.

Among the many memorials to ordinary soldiers and war heroes is one in the middle of the boulevard on Park Mall to all the animals who served and died in World War I. Some reports suggest there were more of them than dead or wounded soldiers.

Dig a bit deeper and there's a story behind each statue. *The Grand Old Duke of York* (as in the children's nursery rhyme) was nearly as famous as Nelson, and rumour has it that he was hoping for a statue as tall as Nelson's. But much to his disappointment, his statue is shorter. You can find it just south of a group of statues in tribute to the Crimean War and Florence Nightingale.

When I mentioned that the statues are everywhere, I meant it.

Look for Sherlock Holmes outside Baker Street Station; the inventor of the railways, Robert Stevenson, outside Euston Station; a pair of dancing centaurs in Whiteleys Department store, off Bay-swagger, and a gaggle of naked gypsies dancing in a fountain in the foyer of Hammersmith subway station.

Paying attention to the statues adds another dimension to your enjoyment of London.

For more photos of statues, visit my blog, www.melodywrenwordpress.com.

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