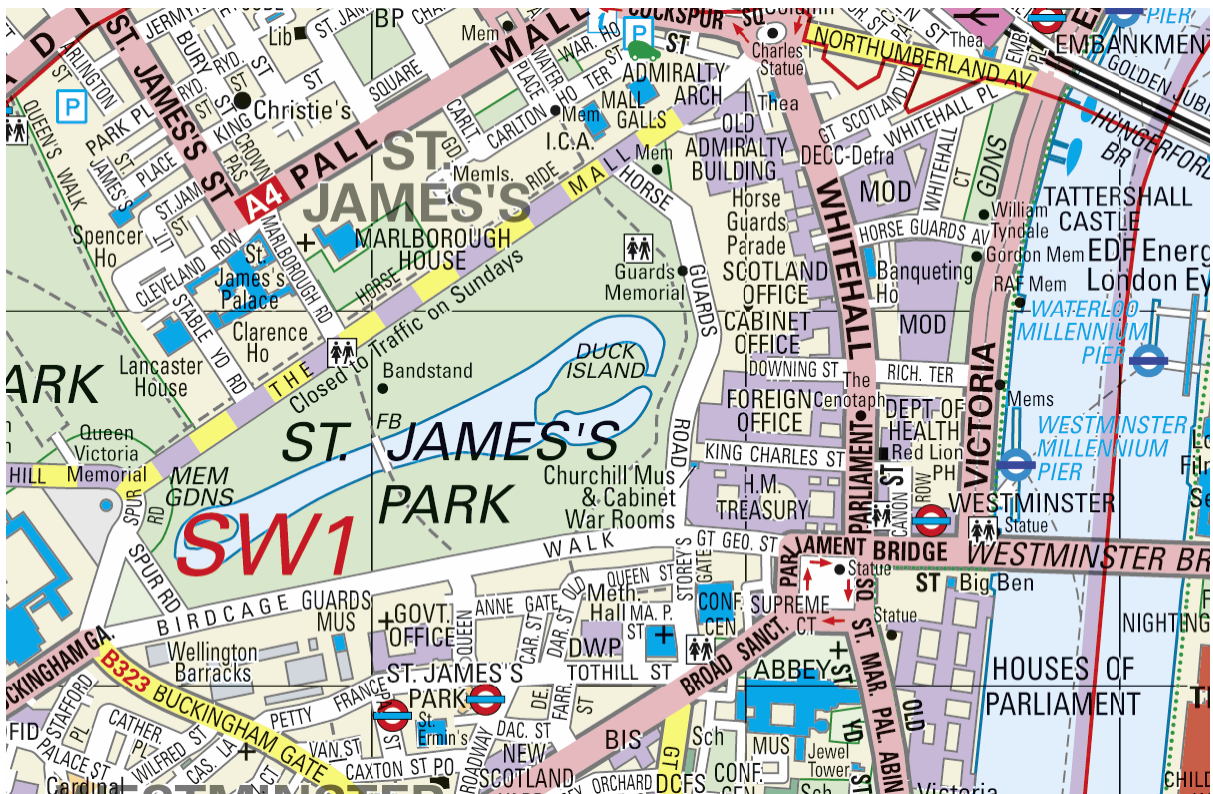
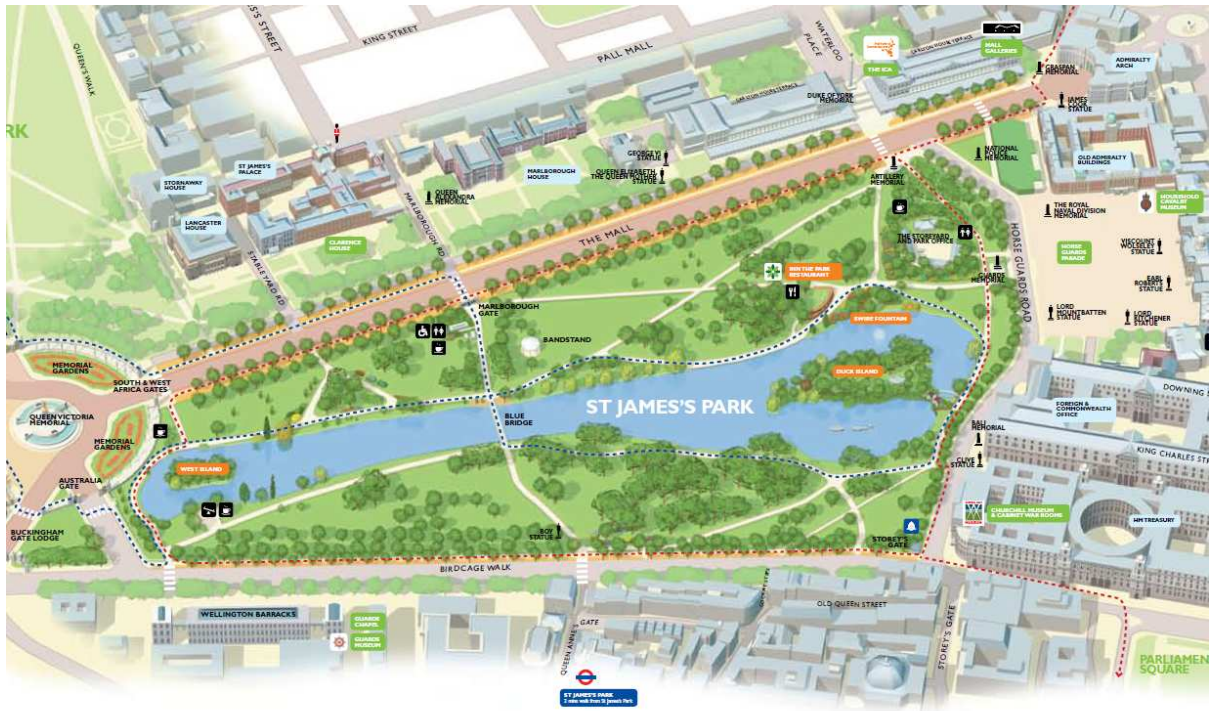




# City of Westminster

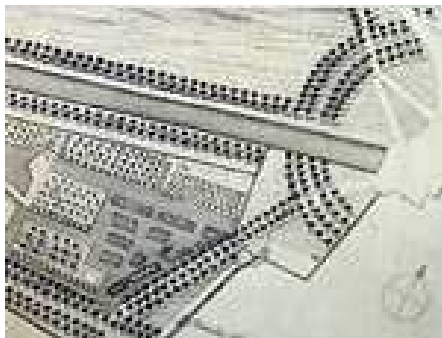
## St James Park





## *St James's Park -*

Walk the elegant paths of St James's Park today and it is hard to imagine that pigs once grazed here. But, 470 years ago, the St James's area was known mainly for farms, woods and a hospital for women lepers.



It was a swampy wasteland which the River Tyburn often flooded on its way to the Thames. It was, however, ideal land for deer hunting, the passion of kings and queens at the time. The royal court was based at the Palace of Westminster and in 1536, King Henry VIII decided to create a deer park conveniently nearby. He acquired land in St James's, put a fence around it and built a hunting lodge that later became St James's Palace.

The deer park stayed largely the same until 1603 when James I became king. He drained and landscaped the park. At the west end, near what is now Buckingham Palace, there was a large pool known as Rosamond's Pond. At the east end, there were several small ponds, channels and islands. These were used as a duck decoy to lure birds that were shot for the royal table.

King James kept a collection of animals in the park. They included camels, crocodiles and an elephant. There were also aviaries of exotic birds along what is now Birdcage Walk. And next to St James's Palace, King James created a flower garden.

The park became more formal when Charles II became king in 1660. He had been in exile in France after the English Civil War and had been impressed by the elaborate gardens belonging to the French royal family. When Charles returned home, he ordered the redesign of St James's Park.



The new park was probably created by the French landscaper, Andre Mollet. The centrepiece was a straight canal, 2,560ft long and 125ft wide, lined on each side with avenues of trees.

King Charles introduced the game, Pelle Melle, from France. This was played on a long fenced court and players used a mallet to hit a ball through a hoop. The courts in St James's Park gave their names to the present day Pall Mall and The Mall. A tradition also began at this time that continues today. In 1664, a Russian ambassador presented a pair of pelicans to the king. Pelicans are still offered to the park by foreign ambassadors and remain one of the most popular sights in the park.



During the 18th century, there were a few minor changes. One end of the canal was filled in to make Horse Guards parade ground. By 1770, Rosamond's Pond had disappeared. In 1761, the royal family bought the building at the end of the Mall known as Buckingham House.



In the 1820s, the park got another great makeover. It was remodelled in the new naturalistic style. The canal became a curving lake. Winding paths replaced formal avenues. Fashionable shrubberies took over from traditional flower beds. Buckingham House was enlarged to create a new palace with a vast arch faced in marble at the entrance. And the Mall was turned into a grand processional route. The work was commissioned by the Prince Regent, later George IV. It was part of a huge project that created many

of London's best-known landmarks, including Regent's Park and Regent's Street. It was overseen by the architect and landscaper, John Nash. He produced the designs in 1827 and within a year the work on St James's Park was finished.

The park you see today is still very much as Nash designed it and there have been only small changes since. Traffic was allowed to use The Mall in 1887. The Marble Arch outside Buckingham Palace was moved to the junction of Oxford Street and Park Lane in 1851. The area outside Buckingham Palace was remodelled between 1906 and 1924 to make space for the Victoria Memorial. An elegant suspension bridge was built across the lake in 1857 and was replaced 100 years later by the concrete one we see today.



The most recent changes aim to complement Nash's work. The shrubberies are being restored in the spirit of his ideas and a new restaurant, which opened in 2004, was designed to blend into the romantic landscape.

