

The National Portrait Gallery Access to blind and partially sighted visitors

Introduction to this guide

This guide provides access details from the nearest Underground, mainline station and buses. It provides information for both partially sighted and blind visitors and takes into account those who may be accompanied by a guide dog.

Please select the route most appropriate to you.

Once at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), there are further

details upon the positions and easiest access for the main areas that visitors may need to locate.

The information contained within this guide was correct at the time of recording in March 2006.

However, please bear in mind that there are currently building works happening close by and Trafalgar Square often hosts special events, which can alter access.

Arriving by underground

The nearest stations are Leicester Square on the Piccadilly and Northern Lines and Charing Cross on the Bakerloo Line.

(Although the Northern Line stops also at Charing Cross, the route from that ticket barrier is long and complex and we do not advise it as an option.)

Neither station has fixed stairs and anyone arriving with a guide dog is advised to seek assistance. If visitors choose to use Embankment Station, (which is guide dog friendlier) we advise that they walk up Villiers Street (which is partly precincted) to The

Strand, turn left and follow the directions from the mainline Charing Cross Station that are included here.

Route 1. Charing Cross Underground – Bakerloo Line

From the ticket barrier, turn right and climb a short flight of steps.

At the top, turn right again, up more steps to street level.

You are in Trafalgar Square.

You will hear traffic to your left and, when they are working, fountains to your right.

Those with useful sight will see the foot of Nelson's Column straight ahead of you.

Turn 180 degrees right, following the rail at the top of the Underground entrance until the traffic sounds to your right and the fountains to your left. Keep towards the traffic without going to the road and walk straight ahead.

Shortly, you will come to a small building reminiscent of a lighthouse. This is the smallest police station in the world.

With this on your left and a tree to your right, continue walking straight. Passing 2 more trees on your right (be aware that there are also bollards along here) you will reach a bus shelter on your left.

Pass the bus shelter, continue straight, still keeping the traffic on

your right. You will walk across two pieces of tactile paving denoting crossings and may notice an upward incline in the path.

Those with some vision may see the façade of St. Martins in the Fields across the road to your right and the right hand end of the National Gallery to your left.

There is an area with no particular sensory landmarks in it, (except for two concrete bollards to the left for those with some useful vision), which is why we recommend to keep straight and use the traffic as a sound symbol.

You will then find a low wall to your left, which could be used as a location only tapping rail. This is a concrete wall with grass behind it.

To your right, there is a metal lamppost with an interesting raised motif at around 2 meters from the ground.

On the wall side, you need to pass the entrance to the National Gallery café, which is immediately followed by a souvenir stand (which may or may not be open). There are various other items, such as electricity junction boxes and a metal gate across a flight of downward steps.

The first obvious entrance is reached shortly afterwards and is a level access to a door into part of the National Portrait Gallery. The door is automatic but opens

manually in times of bad weather. This is a good access point if you are wishing to go to the café before you start your visit.

Otherwise, continue past this entrance with the wall and railings to your left and you will reach the main entrance. Be aware that there may be queues on the left at this point.

This entrance has the National Portrait Gallery's name high above it. 2 shallow steps lead to a revolving door flanked on either side by push/pull doors, which are at right angles to the central revolving door. The bars on these are at a low level. Once inside,

you will find Gallery staff, on your right who may approach you.

2. From Leicester Square (Piccadilly & Northern Lines)

From the ticket barrier, locate exit 1 and climb the steps to street level. You are in Charing Cross Road. Keeping the traffic to your right, walk along the centre of the pavement, there being a lot of street furniture along this stretch. On your left, you will pass two wide passageways between shops and two theatres, Wyndhams and The Garrick. Both theatres have canopies, which are noticeable visually and using shadow echo. Underfoot, you might notice two

pieces of tactile paving denoting crossings. Visually, you may spot three yellow signs warning bus drivers about low hanging trees. Just past The Garrick, there is a bus stop on your right. Shortly after this, there is a NatWest Bank with a small entrance canopy on your left. Opposite this, there is a pedestrian crossing, which you need to use to cross the road. This does not have tactile markings across all the path, only on the ramped edge. It is not an audible crossing, but has the revolving cone under the control box. There is a central island. Upon reaching the up kerb, make a short left and you will find the main entrance to the National

Portrait Gallery on your right. Be aware that there may be queues on the left at this point.

This entrance has the National Portrait Gallery's name high above it. 2 steps lead to a revolving door flanked at right angles on either side by push/pull doors. The bars on these are at a low level. Once inside, you will find Gallery staff, on your right who may approach you.

Arriving by bus

Routes 24, 29, 176

1. If travelling towards Tottenham Court Road

Ask to be put down in Trafalgar Square.

Walk in the direction that the bus was travelling (that is to your right as you get off the bus). Continue straight, keeping the traffic on your right. You will walk across a piece of tactile paving denoting a crossing and may notice an upward incline in the path. Those with some vision may see the façade of St. Martins in the Fields across the road to your right and the right hand end of the National Gallery to your left. There is an

area with no particular sensory landmarks in it, except two concrete bollards on the left for those with useful vision, which is why recommend keeping straight and use the traffic as a sound symbol.

You will then find a low wall to your left, which could be used as a location only tapping rail. This is a concrete wall with grass behind it. To your right, there is a metal lamppost with an interesting raised motif at around 2 meters from the ground.

On the wall side, you need to pass the entrance to the National Gallery café, which is immediately followed by a souvenir stand (which may or may not be open).

There are various other items, such as electricity junction boxes, and a metal gate across a flight of downward steps.

The first obvious entrance is reached shortly afterwards and is a level access to a door into part of the National Portrait Gallery. The door is automatic but opens manually in times of bad weather. This is a good access point if you are wishing to go to the café before you start your visit.

Otherwise, continue past this entrance with the wall and railings to your left and you will reach the main entrance. Be aware that there may be queues on the left at

this point.

This entrance has the National Portrait Gallery's name high above it. 2 shallow steps lead to a revolving door flanked at right angles on either side by push/pull doors. The bars on these are at a low level. Once inside, you will find Gallery staff, on your right who may approach you.

2. If travelling towards Trafalgar Square

Ask to be put down at The Garrick Theatre in Charing Cross Road. Walk in the same direction as the bus was travelling, that is turning right as you leave the bus. Shortly

ahead of the bus stop, you will reach a pedestrian crossing. To your left there is a canopied entrance to NatWest Bank. The crossing is not marked with tactile markings across the pavement, merely on the ramped edge. It does not have an audible signal, but has a revolving cone beneath the control box. You need to take this crossing. There is a central island. Upon reaching the up kerb, make a short left and the main entrance to the National Portrait Gallery is on your right. Be aware that there may be queues on the left at this point.

This entrance has the National Portrait Gallery's name high above

it. 2 shallow steps lead to a revolving door flanked at right angles on either side by push/pull doors. The bars on these are at a low level. Once inside, you will find Gallery staff, on your right who may approach you.

Arriving by taxi or private car

1. If travelling by taxi

Taxis can drop you off just outside the entrances.

2. If travelling by private car

We do not recommend travelling to the Gallery by private car. There are no disabled bays strictly for

National Portrait Gallery use. Five public parking spaces for orange/blue badge holders are located in St Martin's Street opposite the National Gallery's Sainsbury Wing. A public car park is located on the corner of Whitcomb Street and Orange Street. The car park is approximately 195 metres from the Orange Street entrance to the Gallery.

Arriving by train

Charing Cross Station

From the ticket barriers, walk forwards. There are 2 exits from this station and you are advised to use the left hand one opposite platform 6. The signage is for Trafalgar Square, buses and taxis.

There is also an entrance between these 2 exits which takes you down to the Underground and to a subway beneath the roads. We do not advise you to take this route as it involves stairs and a complex network of passages leading to ten different exits. The one nearest to the Gallery is currently in the building site, which

surrounds St. Martins in the Fields. It is far easier at street level.

Having walked through the exit passageway, continue in a straight line towards the road. Those of you with some sight may be able to see Next on your left-hand side and an Eleanor Cross on your right. At the road edge, you will be at a pedestrian crossing, which has a central reservation. It does not have an audible signal but does have a revolving cone beneath the control box. On the up kerb, continue straight ahead of you up a side street, keeping to the left-hand pavement. Follow this round. This takes you to the

main road beside St. Martins in the Fields. At the end of the side road, cross it, (using the crossing). Be aware that directly ahead of you are the steps leading up to the front of the church. Turn left on the up kerb. Cross the pedestrian crossing ahead of you into Trafalgar Square. This does not have an audible signal, but does have a revolving cone beneath the control box. Diagonally ahead of you to the right there is a low concrete wall with grass behind it. Walk along with this wall on your left and the traffic to your right. On the wall side, you need to pass the entrance to the National Gallery café, which is immediately followed by a souvenir stand

(which may or may not be open). There are various other items, such as electricity junction boxes, and a metal gate across a flight of downward steps.

The first obvious entrance is reached shortly afterwards and is a level access to a door into part of the National Portrait Gallery. The door is automatic but opens manually in times of bad weather. This is a good access point if you are wishing to go to the café before you start your visit.

Otherwise, continue past this entrance with the wall and railings to your left and you will reach the main entrance. Be aware that

there may be queues on the left at this point.

This entrance has the National Portrait Gallery's name high above it. 2 shallow steps lead to a revolving door flanked at right angles on either side by push/pull doors. The bars on these are at a low level. Once inside, you will find Gallery staff, on your right who may approach you.

Inside the National Portrait Gallery

The Main Entrance

The main doors bring you into a vestibule, where there are Gallery staff who will be able to assist you. To your immediate left is the entrance to the gift shop. To the right of this there is a second small passageway which leads to the lift (on the right of the passage). The lift is accessible and has Braille and audio prompts.

Ahead of you at the entrance there are three flights of stairs. The

central one goes up and the two on either side go down.

Taking the upward stairs will take you to the first floor. The lift is here on your left. Ahead of you is another doorway, beyond which on your right is the Information Desk from where you can obtain the Gallery's main audio tour guide. To the left ahead of you is the escalator and stairs, which lead to the second floor, where the Main Galleries begin.

Back in the entrance foyer, taking the stairs down leads you to the lower ground floor. Between the two flights of stairs at this level, there is another staircase leading

further down. We will return to this later.

Immediately to the right of the right hand stairs from the entrance, you will find the entrance to the Studio Gallery, where the Fame! exhibition is displayed. The audio guide for this is available just inside the exhibition.

To the left at the bottom of the stairs from the entrance is the lift. So, had you chosen to use the lift from the entrance level, you would exit it and cross directly to the Studio Gallery.

Ahead of you from the stairs, is a passage way to the public toilets.

This angles left. The ladies is on the left, the gents ahead to the right, the baby changing and accessible toilets on the right.

Returning to the second set of downward stairs between the two sets of stairs from the entrance. There are two short flights of stairs.

These lead to the basement where you will locate a second accessible toilet on your right and the bookshop straight ahead of you. The café is located through a doorway at the opposite end of the bookshop to the left.

The Café Entrance

As has already been mentioned, this is level access from the pavement. Inside the doors, you will find you are in a vestibule. To your left there are stairs which will lead you down two flights to the basement. To your right, there are four steps up to the gift shop, which are to the right of a lift which takes you down to the basement café. This lift has audible signals and Braille, but does not have spoken information. It has doors on two sides to allow access from different directions on different levels. There is usually a member of staff on duty in this vestibule.

Once in the Basement, if arriving by lift, the café is to your left. If coming down the stairs, it will be to your right. There is frequently a queue as it is very popular as a meeting place. The serving area is to your left and the staff will provide you with assistance. There are a good many tables, some of those furthest from the entrance are in a quieter part where you may choose to sit if you wish to hold an easier conversation with companions.