**Walk:Charing Cross to Somerset House. Wednesday 13th December 2023.**

On a cold, grey and eventually rainy day a small group, including two new members, enjoyed a walk from Charing Cross to Somerset House calling in at some places of interest on the way.
Our first stop was at St. Martin in the Fields . Outside the main entrance we stopped to admire the life sized ‘carving’ of a small baby boy on a large block of Portland stone. Inside the church a rehearsal for a school Carol Service, taking place later in the day, was underway. We observed the unusual East Window, the Royal Coat of Arms and the Royal Box before visiting the Crypt where there is a shop, a flourishing café and a brass rubbing area and many other facilities.
We observed the Christmas tree, crib and Pop up Market in Trafalgar Square before walking along St. Martin’s Lane to St. Paul’s, the actors church in Covent Garden. We were introduced to one of the church cats but were unable to enter the main part of the church and so not possible to spot the memorial stone to Rose Bruford or any other famous actors on this occasion.
We were a little too early for coffee at the Royal Opera House so walked to the café, originally the gift shop, of the Courtauld Gallery at the entrance to Somerset House.
A brief visit to St. Mary le Strand church followed. This now stands in the recently constructed pedestrian precinct. The windows are high up making the interior darker than the previous two churches. The ceiling is ornate and there are beautiful, deep blue, stained glass windows in the apse. This is said to be the loveliest Baroque church in England.
It became the official church of the WRENS in 1984.
Before walking through Somerset House we visited the newly refurbished and extended shop in the basement of the Courtauld Gallery and admired the beautiful display of gifts and cards for sale there. On our way round Somerset we called in to the Pop -Up charity shop supporting’ Shelter’ where, on the second day of opening, they had sold a Vivienne Westwood, donated coat, for almost £400.
We walked along the Strand back to Charing Cross and arrived in Sidcup as the rain began to fall .
Written by Ilena Harrington (Local History 3)