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## City Skyscrapers

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Distance: 9½ km=6 miles or 8½ km=5 miles                      very easy walking

Region: London                                                              Date written: 25-feb-2015

Author: Thwelder                                                              Last update: 19-sep-2017

Refreshments: everywhere

Map: London A-to-Z    *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*City landscape, tall buildings, architecture*

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### In Brief

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There are so many walking guides to the City of London, showing you the history, the churches, the little lanes, the markets and the older buildings. True to the spirit of this site, this guide is completely different.

The City is an extraordinary beehive of construction, with tall buildings shooting up skywards at dizzying speed. The varied architecture of these buildings deserves intense admiration, as with a super-scale array of modern art. The surrounding plazas and walkways are also surprisingly traffic-free and a delight to traverse. Forty years ago the idea of a skyscraper in London was unheard of, the London clay being so much softer than the rocky underlay of Manhattan. Deep foundations were one way to solve this trivial problem and you will see on this walk several more giants under construction.

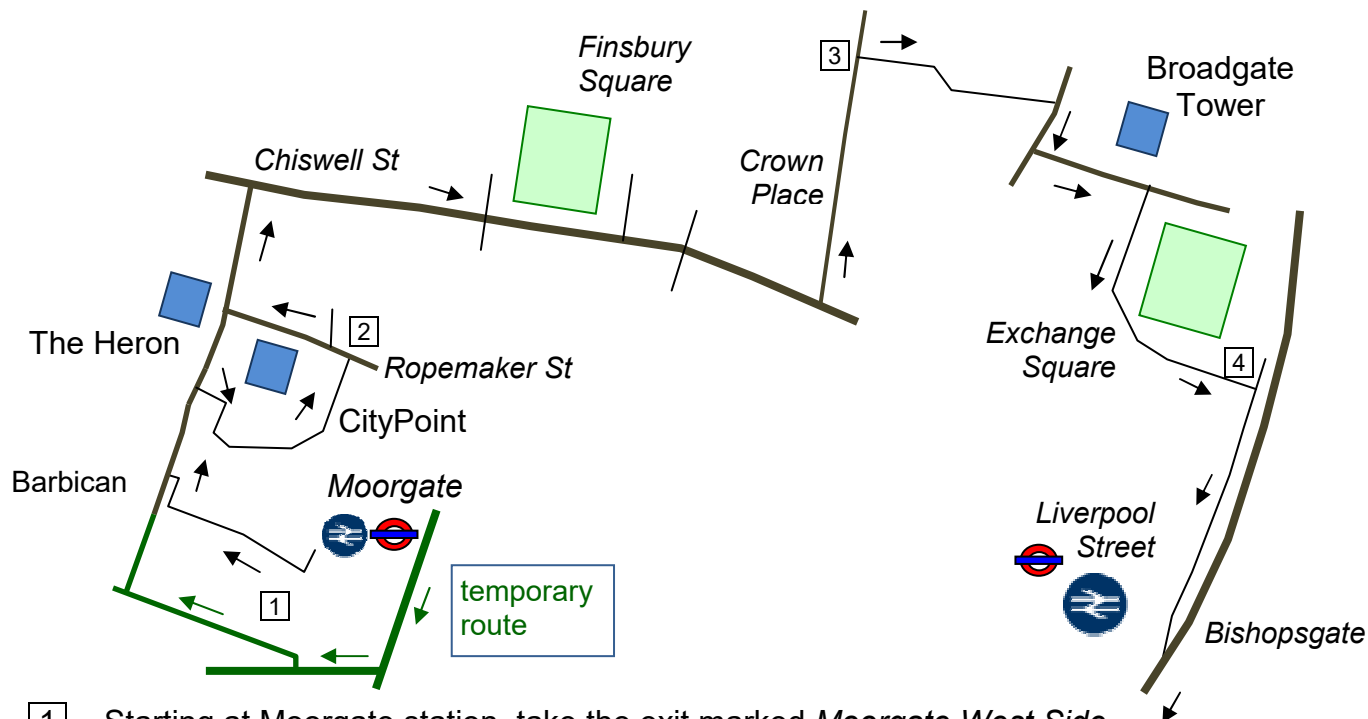
This walk starts at the oldest skyscraper. It then points out all the skyscrapers in the City and ends at the tallest one in London, actually in Southwark so not strictly in the City (in fact the tallest in Europe apart from Moscow). Buildings over 100 metres high are **highlighted** in the script below. If you prefer not to cross the river, you can end the walk at a 17th-century skyscraper, the Monument to the Great Fire of 1666.




The walk begins at **Moorgate Station** (Underground and rail). You need to take the correct exit (see below).

## The Walk

Moorgate, at the start of this walk, is in the midst of a vast construction project which will be **Crossrail**, an underground railway line which will run through Westminster and the City, extending far beyond. For this reason, Moorgate station is rather a jumble and at the time of the last revision in late 2015 the *stairs up to the high path are not accessible*. We have changed the route at the start (temporarily) to go round by the road.



-  Starting at Moorgate station, take the exit marked *Moorgate West Side*. Come out at **Exit 2**, going up some stairs, and turn **right** on the main road, Moorgate, using a narrow temporary footway. After 100m, at the *Globe* pub, turn **right** on London Wall. The building on your right with the curved side is **Moor House** (84 metres high). Immediately after Moor House, turn **right** and immediately **left** on Fore Street. On your left is the vast multi-level development known as **London Wall Place** which will have roof gardens and walkways, incorporating the old London Wall. In 80m, turn **right** on Moor Lane. In 100m or so a right fork leads into a precinct. (But if you would like a quick look at the Barbican, and possibly an overhead peep at the Crossrail development, continue a little further where, on your left, are stairs and a lift leading up to the Barbican High Walk. You need to retrace your steps afterwards. *The Barbican is a vast mainly residential estate begun during the 1960s, including a concert hall and arts centre, the Museum of London and three tall, rather unloved, towers.*) Fork right into the precinct, passing the Bad Egg restaurant, into the atrium of **CityPoint** (122m) (look upwards!). Turn **right** into the large open plaza and wheel **left** round the imposing entrance.

*CityPoint was built in 1967, then called Britannic House, for British Petroleum. It was the first building in the City of London to be built taller than St Paul's Cathedral. Radical refurbishment was done in 2000. CityPoint is now occupied mainly by a law firm. The plaza is a lively area. An occasional attraction is a mobile burger stall which attracts a long queue at lunchtime whilst the surrounding cafés have empty seats.*

- Turn **left** on Ropemaker Street. Immediately opposite is **25 Ropemaker Street** (with the slatted surround). As you go up Ropemaker, **The Heron**

(112m) dominates the skyline. Also known as *Milton Court*, *The Heron* is a residential block. One wing is occupied by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Turn **right** at the corner of The Heron, back on Moor Lane and continue to a T-junction with Chiswell Street. Turn **right** and follow this road, passing on your left (visible down a short lane) the large open space known as the Artillery Ground, used for cricket and rugby. When you reach the rather soulless Finsbury Square, keep straight on along the left-hand side of the square, over two junctions, and continue, past the *Flying Horse* pub, along Sun Street. Note the old line of terraced houses on your left, now (2017) undergoing a comprehensive preservation project. **2 Finsbury Avenue** and **3 Finsbury Avenue**, on the right, are remarkable buildings, one dark glossy metallic and the other with a silvery sheen, criss-cross windows and a “box” structure. You can make a diversion into Finsbury Avenue Square to view them from the other side. At the end of the terrace, take the first small street on the **left**, Crown Place, which is pedestrianised. Soon on your right is **30 Crown Place**, not really a skyscraper but one with an attractive geometric design.

- 3 Continue straight on along Clifton Street and very shortly go **right** between metal bollards on pedestrianised Finsbury Market, making a zigzag round the corner of the BQ (Broadgate Quarter) building, to reach Appold Street opposite its wonderfully retro redstone **Broadwalk House**. Turn **right** and immediately **left** under the colonnade of Broadwalk House. Immediately on your left, suddenly, you reach the plaza of the **Broadgate Tower** (165m), sprouting heavenwards on its A-shaped pillars.

*The Broadgate Tower was built between 2005 and 2009. Unusually, the tower has no conventional foundations. This is because it stands on top of the curving Liverpool Street railway. Instead, it was built over an already-made horizontal “raft”. For this reason, it had to be light as a feather, relatively speaking, and it contains only steel and glass. Construction would have been rapid except for two things. At one stage the passage of trains underneath caused sensitive work to be halted. Also, as so often happens, ancient artefacts were found in the ground. Foster’s residential **Principal Tower**, immediately behind in Shoreditch, will be the same height when complete.*

Turn **right** opposite the Broadgate Tower to an extraordinary dark metallic building suspended on eight massive pins spanned by a parabola of steel. This is **Exchange House**, opened in 1990, now something of a classic. Walk under Exchange House into the Exchange Square.

*Exchange Square, another part of the huge Broadgate estate, is one of the liveliest places in the city, circled by restaurants and full of sun-baskers in warm weather. It was built on what used to be Broad Street station and on the south side you can look down onto the platforms of Liverpool Street station. On the east side is a large sculpture of a prone rubenesque lady known as the “Broadgate Venus”. In the winter months, the square accommodates an ice rink.*

- 4 **See map overleaf.** Go to the **right** of the Broadgate Venus, through an arch, along a passage, and out onto a terrace high above Bishopsgate. Turn **right** along the terrace (a good place to enjoy a coffee). As you proceed, you will see, in the distance to your left, a tall building made in a mosaic of greys and greens. This is the **Nido Spitalfields** (105m), a student accommodation building (although not strictly in the City – it’s in Tower Hamlets). At the end of the terrace, go down steps and continue ahead, passing the entrance to Liverpool Street station on your right. Straight ahead, on the left-hand side, is 110 Bishopsgate, known as the **Heron Tower** (230m), the tallest building in the City.



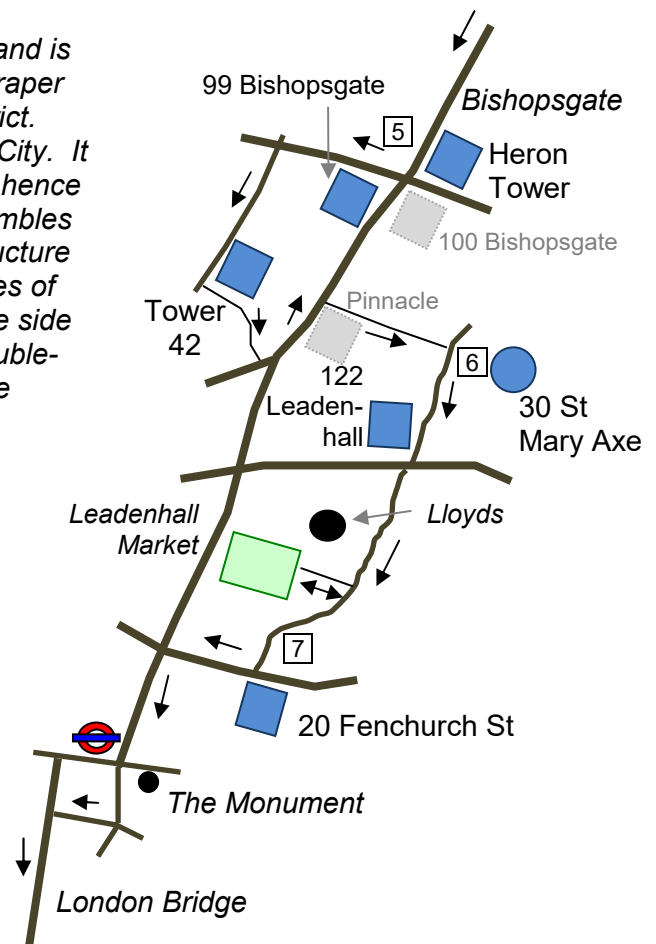
The Heron Tower was built between 2007 and 2011. Recently (2015) a row erupted after the anchor tenant declared that it would be renamed the Salesforce Tower. Inside, behind the reception desk is a huge aquarium tank, 70,000 litres in capacity, containing 1,200 fish. There is a cocktail bar on floor 40, via the scenic elevator, which is open to the public. There are two restaurants in the tower, two of which are on the floors 38-40, and you are welcome to eat there (at City prices). (To reserve at the Duck and Waffle, ring 0203-640-7310, but note their dress code: no beachwear, no flip-flops!)

Adjacent, on the same side of Bishopsgate, over Camomile Street is the excavation site of **100 Bishopsgate** which will become two mixed-use buildings with a tower that rivals its neighbour. In the opposite corner is the more compact **99 Bishopsgate** (104m).

- 5 At this junction of the tall Bishopsgate buildings, turn **right** on Wormwood Street, going under an overhead walkway, and turn first **left** on Old Broad Street, quickly reaching **Tower 42** (183m), known for historical reasons as the *Natwest Tower*.

*Tower 42 was built between 1971 and 1980 and is remembered by Londoners as the first skyscraper worthy of the name in the City Financial District. For 30 years it was the tallest building in the City. It was built for the National Westminster Bank, hence its original name, and in cross section it resembles the three-chevron logo of that bank. The structure is of a massive concrete core, the three leaves of each floor being attached to the core from the side (a "cantilever" design). The elevators are double-decked, stopping at odd-even floors (as in the Empire State Building).*

Turn **left** immediately **after** Tower 42, go up some steps and turn **right** through an enclosed passage into Fountain Court, an oasis of quiet. Cross to the other side, turn **left** and go out through an ornate metal gate onto Threadneedle Street. Turn **left** to reach Bishopsgate beside the venerable Gibson Hall. Cross by the lights and turn **left** along the other side of Bishopsgate. On your right is a large excavation, the first roots of the **Pinnacle**, 22 Bishopsgate. At 278m, the Pinnacle will be the tallest building in the City quarter. Construction began in 2008 but was suspended whilst the original spiral ("helter-skelter") design was modified. It has been bought by a consortium headed by Axa (the French finance company). In 60m, immediately after the Pinnacle site, turn **right** on a small street. You reach the 12th-century church of St Helen's Bishopsgate, the largest surviving church in the City, full of memorials and a fine antidote to the 21st-century modernism all around. Pass to the right of the church instantly reaching **30 St Mary Axe** (180m).



The “Gherkin” as it is affectionately known is the most recognisable skyscraper and a kind of icon, like Big Ben and the London Eye. Its lonely site makes it seem approachable, as though you could put your arms around it and take it home. It was designed by Norman Foster and opened in 2004. It stands on the site of the old Baltic Exchange, damaged by the IRA in 1992. The design for the building beat several other proposals for the site. Since then, the Gherkin has featured in a “Harry Potter” and other films with Sharon Stone and Woody Allen. In 2014 you could have bought the Gherkin by outbidding the £700 million paid at that time.

- 6 Turn **right** in front of the Gherkin on St Mary Axe, immediately reaching, on your right, **122 Leadenhall Street** (225m).

*The Leadenhall Building is affectionately known as the “Cheesegrater” from its wedge shape. It is the second tallest building in the City of London (after the Heron Tower). It was designed by Richard Rogers and work started in 2010 on the site of another building dating only from 1969, also damaged by the IRA. The wedge shape prevents spoiling the sightline of St Pauls Cathedral when viewed from the west or from Richmond Park (see the “Richmond-Barnes” walk in this series). In 2014 some steel bolts fell off the structure; this resulted in the area underneath the building being closed: otherwise you would be able to walk underneath it for a better view.*

Continue straight on and cross over Leadenhall Street onto Lime Street. On your left is the development site of **The Scalpel** (190m), a pointy skyscraper. On your right you pass the extraordinary **Lloyds Building**.

*The Lloyds Building, where insurance business is conducted, was also designed by Richard Rogers and, like the Pompidou Centre in Paris, it uses a technique whereby the “bowels” of the building (ducts, cables, lifts) are placed on the outside giving it an “inside-out” look. As a result, the interior is spacious with escalators rising in mid-air. The top floor, the committee room, is an adaption of the room designed by Robert Adam in 1763 for Bowood House.*

Immediately after the Lloyds Building, the lane on the right will take you, as an interesting diversion, to an large ornate covered market. **Leadenhall Market**, is a large covered market dating from the 1300s, with an ornate roof, an excellent place for lunch or a snack. Your need to retrace your steps afterwards back to Lime Street. Follow curving Lime Street for 150m, passing on your right 21 Lime Street, site of a huge Roman forum, under excavation for an as-yet-unnamed project, till you come out to Fenchurch Street. Immediately opposite is **20 Fenchurch Street** (160m).



*The 20 Fenchurch Street building, completed in 2014, is known as the “walkie-talkie” because of its curvy shape. The design, by the Uruguayan architect Rafael Viñoly, is “postmodern”, a codeword for chunky rather than light. Indeed, it was criticised in the press as “bloated”. The curved shape occasionally acts as a lens for the sun’s rays and, in one notorious incident, it melted the paint on a Jaguar car parked in the street below. The space at the top of the building is a “sky garden”, billed as “the UK’s tallest public park”. You can reserve a visit via their website and, if you like, eat at the Brasserie with a quite spectacular view.*

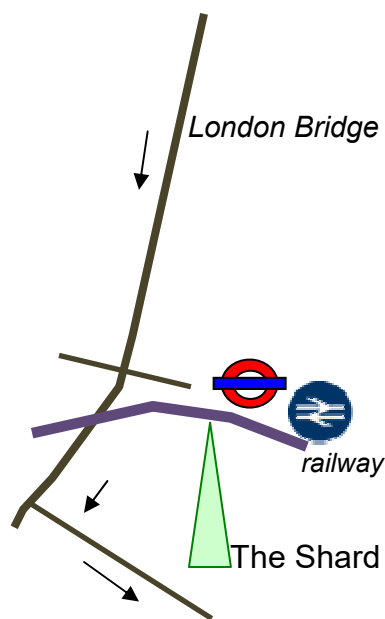
- 7 Facing 20 Fenchurch Street, turn **right** to reach the next major intersection, Gracechurch Street. Near the corner to your right you can see the arched form of **20 Gracechurch Street**, totally renovated in 2009, with its Portland stone façade. Turn **left** on Gracechurch Street and continue dead straight over the next junction into the smaller Fish Street Hill. You quickly arrive at a famous fluted column which was for centuries the tallest structure in London besides St Paul’s Cathedral.

*The Monument to the Great Fire of London of 1666 stands a few feet from Pudding Lane where the fire began, in a baker's shop. Designed by the two great notables of the day, Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke, it is the tallest isolated stone column in the world. It is topped by a gilded urn sprouting a representation of shooting flames. There is a viewing platform at the top.*



Monument station is close by (District and Circle lines), as is Bank Underground station, in case you want to finish your journey here. Otherwise, turn **right** opposite the Monument on Monument Street, turn next **left** and walk over London Bridge. You are now no longer in the City but in Southwark, a district which in previous centuries was a much more dissolute and riotous borough than the austere City. Keep straight on over a major junction, under the railway, and turn **left** on St Thomas Street. Ahead of you is the **Shard** (309m), the tallest building in Europe outside Moscow.

*The Shard is named from its resemblance to a wedge of broken glass. It was built between 2009 and 2012 having been designed by the Italian architect Enzo Piano who sketched the shape on the back of a restaurant menu. The name "Shard" is not a nickname but the name chosen by the developers and emblazoned in huge letters on the structure during its construction, watched with interest by the whole of London as the jumping cranes gradually moved up floor by floor. The top of the Shard is a clutter of steel uprights and platforms giving the "broken glass" look from a distance and just below them, with the uppermost floor in the fresh air, is the public viewing area, marketed as the "View from the Shard" and definitely worth the entrance charge.*



After your visit, the nearest station is **London Bridge** (Underground and rail), which is itself undergoing extensive renovation. The entrance is immediately next to the Shard.

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