

A.S.L.A.N.

ALL SOULS LOCAL ACTION NETWORK



'Going round in
circles': Life on
the streets

Full story on page 4



The ASLAN family currently includes over 600 volunteers and guests

ASLAN ALL SOULS LOCAL ACTION NETWORK

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ASLAN is governed under the auspices of the PCC of All Souls Church. Registered charity 1132882.

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'I HAVE MADE YOU AND I WILL CARRY YOU; I WILL SUSTAIN YOU AND I WILL RESCUE YOU.'
 ISAIAH 46 VERSE 4

One of the first things potential ASLAN volunteers find out is that most teams serve only once every four weeks. You can see the surprise: 'Is that all?'

But the ASLAN model is about perseverance and long-term sustainability. It has to be; building deep and trusting relationships takes a long time, especially if life has taught you distrust.

Once every four weeks (almost inevitably with the occasional missed session) seems to be a sacrifice of time that we can sustain. Team members like Mark (pages 10–11) and Roger and Esther (page 7) serve for many years; others, in London only for a year or two, are able to serve despite pressures of family, work or studies. Long-term service requires ongoing motivation, and that comes from the support of a team, opportunities for training and learning, growing bonds with guests and the growing expertise of experience. And, we hope, from a growing knowledge of Jesus, though Christian belief is not a prerequisite for volunteering.

If we witness perseverance in our volunteers, it is no less evident in our guests. Bala (pages 4–5) takes us back to the 1980s, and some guests have been affected by homelessness for as long, and longer. For Daniel and others (also pages 4–5) 'the days blend into one' and life is 'a constant fight to survive'. Month to month, year to year, we witness the perseverance of those struggling to navigate housing, health and employment in our city, for whom there is no 'once every four weeks' option.

In these pages we celebrate the shared humanity of the whole ASLAN family, and the God who sustains us all. Come and meet us.

Liz Middleton (ASLAN volunteer)

A Warm Welcome

Each week, guests come to the Welcome Desk at All Souls, Langham Place for invitations to the coming Saturday's ASLAN Entertainment Evening.

These evenings at All Souls Clubhouse are popular for their hearty meals, Bible studies and occasional films. Outings happen several times a year too.

There are seven Welcome Desk volunteers, and on duty every Monday and Tuesday morning is Mei Lee. Serving at the start of the week means that Mei gives out the most invitations and sees the most ASLAN guests.

Mei also gets directly involved in ASLAN, sometimes joining a Sandwich Making team on a Friday evening, to supply the Tea Run early on Saturday morning.

Mei has served for seven years. Does that seem a long time?

'It's God's work. I enjoy it when ASLAN guests come to get the invites. Many know me and I think they trust



me; I am happy to see them and serve them. I ask them about other guests, like, "I've not seen so and so for a long time. What happened to them?"



The conversation is genial this Monday morning. 'You have lovely hair,' says Mei to Alan. 'She's always smiling,' he says. Mei and Steven K have known each other for a while. 'She always does a grand job,' we're told. Mei responds, 'He is a very pleasant guy.'

Stephen B values the way Mei 'treats everybody the same, with respect,' and John H agrees: 'She's always very friendly, it's a good knack to have.' 'The job suits her,' nods Sam.

Pictured here with Mei, James C (Mei: 'He's always cheerful and polite') says, 'Everybody is very generous, polite and considerate here. I'm very grateful for that.' Thanks to Mei and the team, the Welcome Desk is living up to its name.



CONTENTS

3 A warm welcome More than just an invitation

4 A week on the streets Then and now

6 Meet Robert - A Walking Wonder Sleeping rough and travelling on foot

7 In Memory We remember ASLAN friends who have passed

8 A week in the life... Katie Huggins, ASLAN Manager

10 '10 years not out' Mark reflects on his time with ASLAN

A Week in the Life...

On the streets, now and then

Now

Sarah offers ESOL support through ASLAN at Webber Street Day Centre. At university, she once spent a snowy night sleeping rough, the next day hanging out in the local library, wandering the streets, sharing chips and getting bored and cold. But what is life on the streets really like? She asked her students.

Daniel spends a lot of time on his own; he enjoys his own company, reading books and browsing the internet in the local library. His phone, Facebook and newspapers are sources of information on free events in town, and he loves spending time at the Imperial War Museum, the zoo and local parks, and watching science fiction, adventure and drama films. His next museum outing is planned for the National Gallery. He has a zero-hour contract and is currently studying for his Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) exams; he is finding saving money challenging. He suffers from lack of sleep and stress, but is thankful for his health and his skills. He finds the days all blend into one.

Two other students didn't want to be named. They said a typical week involves a variety of day centres and time in the library and the park, where they can sleep. Also on zero-hour contracts, they wait for a call to work. Their favourite part of the week is the weekend and they look forward to coming to Webber Street on a Saturday, where they might be booked in for showers. They are thankful for their health and grateful for some (not all!) Webber Street volunteers; they appreciate the help with clothing, access to computers and help with appointments. One described life as 'a constant fight to survive'.



Then

Bala now has a place to live, but for many years he lived between squats, hostels, other people's floors, shelters and the street. He described a typical week in the late 1980s.

'You had to leave the hostel by 9am. I'd go to the Manna Centre for breakfast and a cup of tea, a chat. Maybe about cricket. I'd stay there for lunch too. You could get a shower, clothes; you'd feel clean, but only on the outside. At that time, I felt unwelcome, an outcast. I never had much company, particularly female company—and when I did get chatting to a lady it wasn't long before I was asked, "Can you lend me some money?"

'The Manna Centre closed at 1:30pm and then I would go to the medical libraries and read the books, sometimes until 8pm. Once a week Webber Street had an evening meal. On other days I'd spend time on the university campus, feeling maybe I could be a student. I'd leave towards 10pm; there was often a tea run under the arch near Tooley Street, and then I'd make my way back to the hostel. That was my life, going round in small circles like a pigeon.

"Money day" was the highlight of the week. You got your Giro: it was a green piece of paper and you had to take it to the post office to get the money. That felt exciting; which pocket should I keep it in? If I had a dentist's appointment, or went to see the doctor, that was another highlight; something different.

'My routine changed after something I heard at Webber Street: there was a saviour who loved me and could meet my needs. That made me sit up. And people took an interest in me there—it was a bit strange. I saved up and bought a bicycle so I could get there in time for the Bible talk each morning!'

Bala has been through a lot, both before then and since. Whatever lies ahead, he wants us to know: 'I have a rich inheritance in Christ Jesus.'



Robert - 30 Years on the Road

Robert is a regular member of the Bible study group that meets during Saturday entertainment evenings and is part of the ASLAN Visiting Scheme. Anne and Ian, Robert's visiting friends, caught up with him in Amsterdam.

I grew up in London, studied engineering at Cambridge and worked as an engineer. Then I lost my job. I really like walking so I said to myself, either I get a job that I like more than walking or I go walking. I couldn't get that job so I went walking.

I've been walking since about 1989. My first walk was to Gibraltar. It took me about six months or so. Then I went walking right round Italy. I walked down to Yugoslavia. That was when the war started in Yugoslavia and the Italian police warned me not to walk through there so I about-turned and walked back to Brindisi and then got the ferry across to Greece and walked around Greece.

I always slept rough. To start with I was not happy about being homeless. I can remember walking through Portugal, rain was coming down and I thought, 'It would be nice if I could be inside.' Now the rain doesn't bother me. There's no such thing as bad weather, there's the wrong clothes.

As you can imagine, Anne and Ian have found it very interesting getting to know Robert, and easy too. 'We always look forward to hearing what he's been up to since we last had dinner together. We chat about a wide range of topics and usually come away with a recommendation for a good book.'

When I'm walking on the road, I walk about 20km a day. Once you get in a town, it's hard to gauge how far you've walked. I walk a bit. I stop and have a coffee, do a bit of reading, bit of sightseeing and then I go and find a place to sleep.

I found out about ASLAN through Mary. She was a regular at the day centre that I go to. She was the Scrabble demon. There was no one who could bash her at Scrabble. I'm fairly good at Scrabble, I should say, but not like her. Anyway, she told me about ASLAN.

ASLAN gives me somewhere to go on Saturday night and good company, people like yourselves and lots of other good people. I go there every Saturday night really, when I'm in London. London has very mild winters and I spend the winter in London. Mostly.



In Memory

This year the ASLAN family has lost several dear members. There is grief but also comfort as we think of Jesus' words: 'whoever believes in me will live, even though they die' (John 11:25).

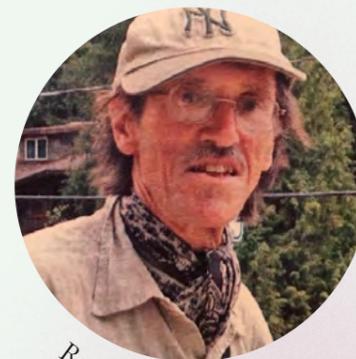
Attending the funerals has brought guests and volunteers together, and has been a privilege, allowing us to learn more about our friends' lives outside ASLAN, to meet their families and share reminiscences. We thank God for each of them.

John was a familiar face at Webber Street and the Clubhouse. Always very warm and friendly, he had an infectious smile. He loved learning, was always inquisitive and enjoyed discussing spiritual things; he was fascinated by the Bible. His family from New Zealand were grateful for the friendship ASLAN provided John, and we were grateful for the opportunity to get to know some of them when they visited the Clubhouse during a trip to London.

Roger was a faithful volunteer and much loved by his Webber St, entertainment and shelter teams. He was reliable and humble and always went above and beyond; he was calm and kind and he kept the best interests of our guests at the heart of his service. His team leader gave the ultimate tribute: 'I want to learn from his example'.

Esther served enthusiastically and selflessly for many years as leader of a Friday night sandwich-making team. She put the needs of others first, reflecting the love she had experienced from Christ her saviour. We grieve her loss, but 'not as those who have no hope' (1 Thessalonians 4:13), for we know we will see her again.

As we go to press we've just heard of the death of *Bob G*, known to many from Webber Street and the Clubhouse, and to others as a shelter team-mate. Bob often had criticisms and suggestions for how we could do things better; more often he had a joke and a friendly greeting.



Roger



Esther



John with his cousin



Bob G

A Week in the Life...

Katie Huggins, ASLAN Manager

SUNDAY

I start the week at church. There, (unscheduled) tasks include: a volunteer chat, a safeguarding issue, a beer chiller needing transport.

MONDAY

A short morning—Monday is All Souls staff prayers and lunch. First: spend time reflecting on a potential new initiative, and alternative ideas. Look to the week ahead. Deal with a guest's complaint.

Over lunch, discuss a minibus booking.

Afternoon tasks include coordination with St Martin's in the Fields and London City Mission; also, a review of the ASLAN Admin role.

Glad to meet and pray with my very godly colleagues P and C.

Evening: Need to agree dates for laying new Clubhouse floor! Arrange meeting with potential new volunteer. Then training at All Souls; thrilled to see many volunteers there.

TUESDAY

This morning it's about:

An ex-volunteer, a new volunteer, a struggling volunteer; the grateful family of a guest who died recently; also, two safeguarding issues. An anti-trafficking conference place for a team leader, a tea run session for a church intern, a boat trip/ picnic to Kew Gardens for ASLAN guests; dates for Christmas events (I liaise with The American Church). A safeguarding poster and website page; Visiting Scheme expenses; finance, including a long questionnaire about our links with money laundering in Venezuela (none!).

This afternoon's 'to do' list:

New volunteers, minibus, relatives of a guest, clothes sorting, liaise with HomelessWise, and (joyfully) circulate stories from recent months to team leaders, suggesting a reflection exercise for their volunteers.

Plus: A solicitor phones—an ex-volunteer has left a legacy to ASLAN; it's taken three years to find us! BBC News phone wanting to film our work (answer: no); refer them to West London Mission.

WEDNESDAY

Day off.



THURSDAY

Morning meetings with a safeguarding colleague, a graphic design colleague, the church Manager, two ministers, new volunteers, Westminster Council and St Mungo's.

UCL ask: can they interview ASLAN guests? No. But offer interviews with volunteers.

Council Drug and Alcohol Wellbeing Service coordination session: can P attend?

After lunch, I email a recently bereaved volunteer, and a keen new one. Read the latest bulletins from Homeless Link and One Westminster: no new training for us, but good to see how we can complement their amazing work.

More safeguarding work: policy coordination, a vulnerable volunteer.

Write a reference for a volunteer; very proud of him. G messages: her team's short for Saturday, so I email other teams. Nine days till the Kew Gardens trip...

FRIDAY (DAY OFF. SORT OF.)

Morning-

Deal with an email. Coordinate a prison visit. Signpost Westminster Council to St James' Piccadilly. Chase and circulate leaders' reports. Approve Tamar request for food parcel to an exploited woman. Finish and send out July Volunteers' News.

Time out for Frances Whitehead's funeral this afternoon. Then: drop off beer chiller; meet potential new volunteer.

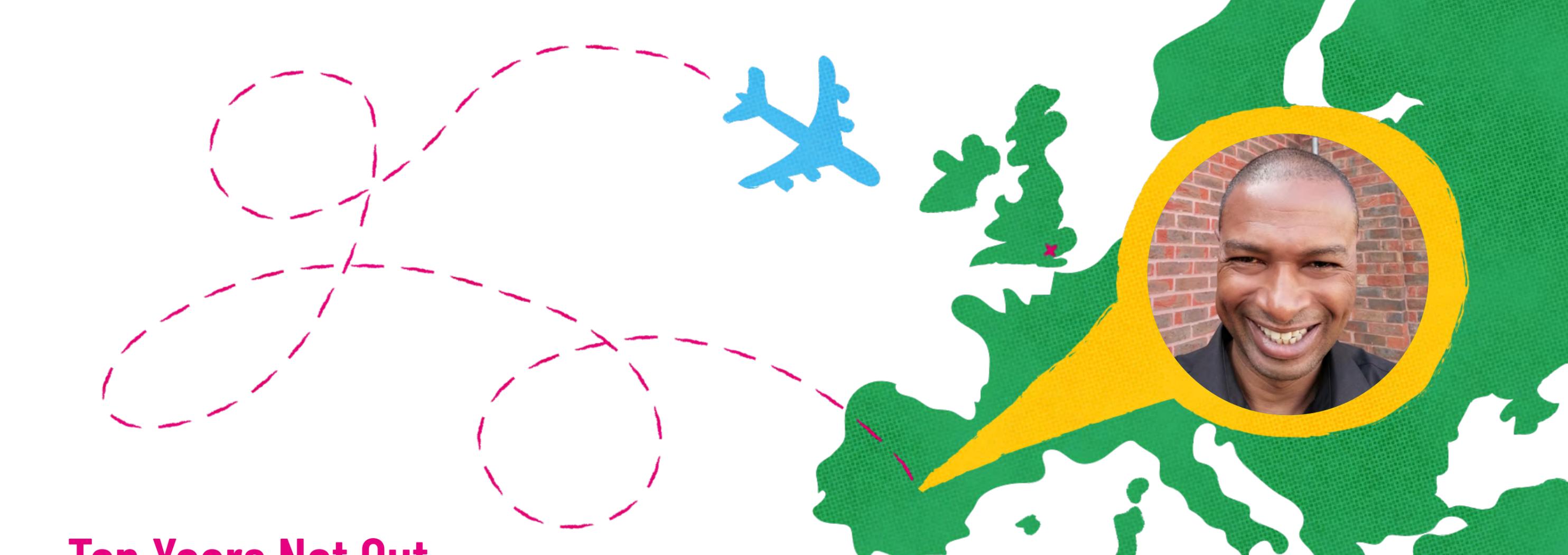
In the evening, lead a clothes-sorting session while the sandwich team work downstairs.

SATURDAY

I'm at Webber St, where G is leading. I chat with guests, interview a new volunteer, pray over a couple of arguments.

Salvation Army friends have directed a young Portuguese chap to us. He is working but sleeping rough and wants help. Arrange to take him to a hostel; sadly, they are full. Go to Clubhouse, make tea, tell him how dangerous rough sleeping is. Book him into another hostel for a few days on the understanding that he gets help from social services after the weekend. Then set up for this evening's Life Explored meeting. Leave happy.

Remember the day centre this morning: as I leave, G is leading the Bible group and can't stop to say goodbye; I can see she's excited as she and the guests happily discuss God's word together.



Ten Years Not Out

Veteran ASLAN volunteer Mark Li now lives in Valencia, Spain, but travels back and forth to cook for the night shelter throughout its months of operation. 2019–2020 will be his tenth and final shelter season.

I met Tim Aldeburgh [then the ASLAN Project Coordinator] back in 2005 and he roped me into the 3am tea run. I saw some things that shocked me; I didn't realise what homelessness really was until I experienced it that morning.

I did the tea run for nine years. I think I only missed about five shifts. I missed one and Tim said to me, 'It's alright Mark, but our guests were really looking forward to seeing you because you tell them funny stories and they enjoy listening.' I felt pretty bad. I couldn't be bothered to get out of bed, and people who were sleeping rough on the streets were looking forward to seeing me. Thereafter I never missed one if I could avoid it.

Tim is now 6000 miles away in Hong Kong but he and Mark still speak regularly. Tim values Mark's 'friendship, brotherly love and support' and knows everyone values his cooking skills and practical no-nonsense approach; 'I've met few people in my life who have the gift of perseverance like Mark. He is able to get up and get on, day in, day out.'

The whole volunteering thing I enjoy. I like the fact that ASLAN has a range of things. 'OK I can't do that one because of work, but I can do that one.' You have a range of opportunities for volunteers.

We started the winter shelter nine years ago at the Clubhouse. This is my last season. I'm going to do ten years and that's it. We don't own it, what we do is contribute our time. I treat it like a cricket innings, ten years not out. That sounds like a pretty good reason to retire and let somebody else take over.

You don't sustain yourself; you go to do what you can as part of a team. Because that's what we are – a team. At the end of the season, if people stick with it, then 40 or 50 people will be housed. That's the incentive. That's what keeps you going.

We had some people who were housed and got jobs and came back and volunteered, so it went full circle. That was good. They'd sit there with those who were going through the process and they were saying, 'Last year I was sitting where you're sitting. Stay with it.' You can see the fruits of your volunteering when people are actually coming back like that. And they're helping other people to get off the streets.

I think that if we can encourage people to make good choices then all is well. I'm no angel, I'm no saint, I'm not God Almighty, but what I can do is, as a human being, offer something to somebody else. Offer a human being a helping hand and if by leave of that they can help themselves, I'm happy with that.

I've learnt tolerance. And listening rather than talking to people, because homeless people don't need to be talked at. I used to talk a lot and very loudly. It was a sea-change for me; I've learned to listen.

I'm sure that over the years the winter shelter will get better and better because it's a formula that works. People are being housed. We build on that and hopefully do better and I'll be an old fogey and they'll say, 'You remember that bloke who used to come on a Sunday and cook for us? He just turned 102.'

A Week in the Life...

A.S.L.A.N.

Sunday

WESTMINSTER NIGHT SHELTER

Dinner
Conversation
Showers
Sleep



ALL SOULS
CLUBHOUSE



Friday

SANDWICH MAKING
20 loaves
Time with the team

Monday

NIGHT SHELTER BREAKFAST

ALL SOULS WELCOME DESK OPENS
FOR INVITATIONS



Saturday

TEA RUN

Hot drinks
Sandwiches
Hot food
Underwear
A chat

An invitation to dinner

DAY CENTRE

Everyone welcome
Breakfast
Conversation
Bible study
English classes
(Pre-booked) showers and
clothing

Monday to Friday

VISITING SCHEME

Dinner
Conversation
Prayer

OCCASIONAL TRAINING SESSIONS

CLOTHES SORTING

Come with colleagues, friends,
on your own
What size?
Hang it up
Fold it



ENTERTAINMENT EVENINGS

Dinner
Conversation
Bible study
Films and outings

If you'd like to know more or are interested in volunteering
visit www.aslan.org.uk

ANNUAL ASLAN OPEN EVENING IN OCTOBER

Monday 7th October 2019 7-9pm

All Souls Clubhouse 141 Cleveland Street W1T 6QG