

# An East End Sunday markets walk

**Updated:** 16 December 2019

**Length:** About 2½ miles

**Duration:** Around 2½ hours

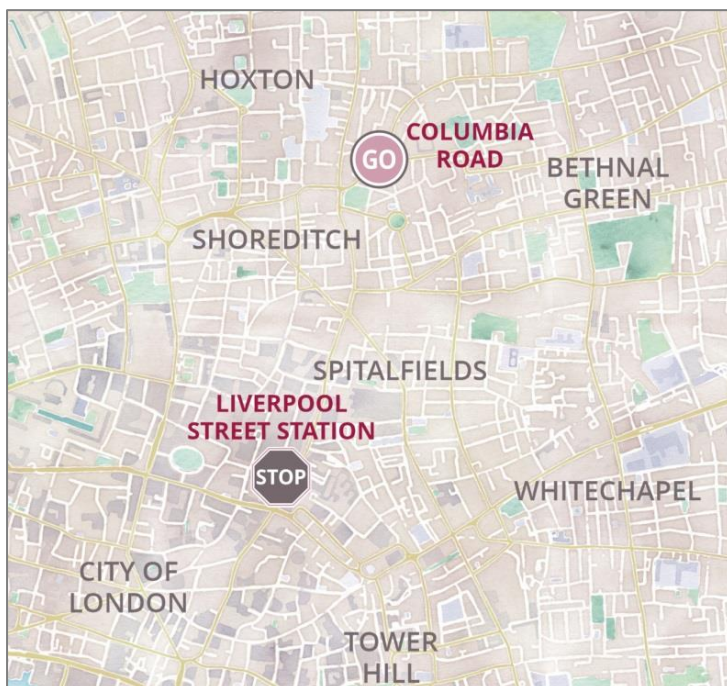
## GENERAL INFORMATION

I suggest this walk is done on a Sunday as the colourful Columbia Road Flower Market, Petticoat Lane and most of the Brick Lane Markets are only open on Sundays.

Spitalfields is also open on weekdays, but Sundays are the busiest and best days to visit.

I will point out that if you start to explore the actual markets in any great depth, browsing at many of the stalls and making purchases, then it's unlikely you'll have time to visit them all. Columbia Road is only open in the mornings, whilst Brick Lane and Spitalfields Markets stay open for most of the afternoon. Petticoat Lane is primarily a morning only market, but in reality, it is also open for most of the afternoon.

However, if you aren't so bothered about markets, and would just like to visit this fascinating area of the old East End of London, then any day would be suitable.



## GETTING HERE

Columbia Road, which is in the East End of London, is perhaps not the easiest destination to find if you don't know the area – in which case I suggest you use a map of London to track its location. I start the walk at the west end of Columbia Road, where it leads eastwards off Hackney Road.

The easiest way to get here is by bus.

### Buses

26 (destination Hackney Wick) The service starts at Waterloo station, travelling through parts of Central London, including Aldwych, the Strand, St Paul's Cathedral, Bank station, Liverpool Street 55 (destination Walthamstow) The service starts at Oxford Circus, then via Tottenham Court Road, Bloomsbury Square, Old Street station.

With both routes alight at the Columbia Road/Hackney Road stop – it's the stop after Shoreditch station – 'Stop R'.

The nearest tube station is Liverpool Street – from there take bus number 26.

For all transport routes, times and details I suggest you look at the Transport for London website for more details.

From the Hackney Road/Columbia Road bus stop – cross over to the other side of Hackney Road. Until fairly recently many of the shops along here were long-established, small wholesale/retailers, many selling leather goods, but since younger 'millennials' have begun moving into the area (attracted by the lower cost of housing) many of these have closed and are now 'fashionable boutiques and lifestyle shops'.

## INTRODUCTION

London's West End is considered by many to be just the area of Central London which contains many of the major tourist attractions, such as the big stores of Oxford Street and Knightsbridge; the shops, theatres and nightlife in places such as Covent Garden and Soho, as well as the museums and galleries of Kensington and Bloomsbury, but doesn't actually extend much further out to the west.

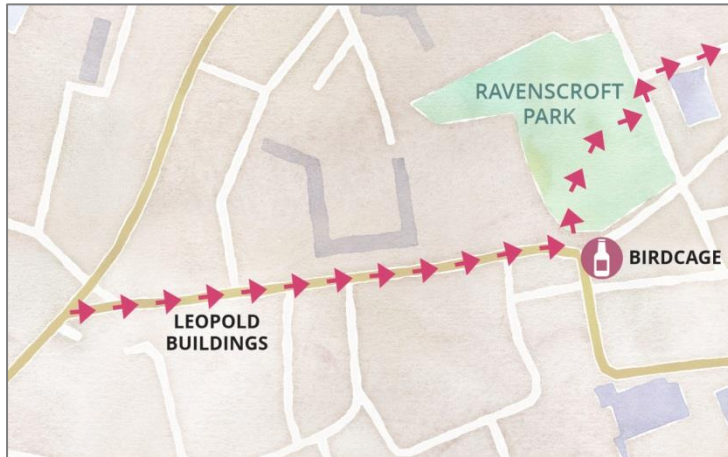
The East End, however, is often reckoned to include the enormous area that stretches from the financial centre of the City of London as far out as ... well, some say as far as the border of the county of Essex.

Unlike the west of London, the East End has always been synonymous with the docks, industry and of course poverty, overcrowding and immigration. Indeed, it is probably only over the past few decades that many of the social ills of the area have begun to be addressed. Parts of the East End have benefited enormously by the arrival there of young people who, unable to afford to live elsewhere in London, 'moved east'.

Developments such as Canary Wharf and the Docklands Light Railway mass transit scheme have changed both the skyline and the prosperity beyond anything that could have been imagined even thirty years ago.

It is an area rich in history, and much of it has been shaped by the many different cultures brought here by immigrants from all over the world.

This walk takes a look at several areas of the East End that have changed dramatically over the past few years, yet still retain some of their original history. In particular, it visits a feature that still exists in the East End today – which is the famous markets, several of which are still going strong after several hundred years. It also takes a look at how immigration has changed the area – for example the ‘curry houses’ of Brick Lane’s ‘Banglatown’ and the Huguenots of Spitalfields.



Route map 1

## STARTING THE WALK

Head up **Columbia Road** – it leads off from the opposite side of Hackney Road from the bus stop – you can’t mistake it as there’s a tiny triangular grassed area at the beginning.

On the right you’ll see a long terrace of rather unusual looking six-storey apartment buildings, with external open stairwells and little balconies. These are the Leopold Buildings – named after Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany (1853–84), the youngest son of Queen Victoria, and built in 1872 by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company. The land had been purchased for them by Angela Burdett-Coutts, at the time one of the richest women in England and one of the country’s greatest philanthropists. (She did a lot of work trying to help the poor in London’s East End, and I explain more about her later.)

The Leopold Buildings are now Grade II listed and were fully refurbished in 1997 at a cost of around £3.5 million.

The **Improved Industrial Dwellings Company** was formed in 1863 by Sir Sidney Waterlow, a printer, philanthropist, and later a Lord Mayor of London. It was known as a ‘model dwelling company’ – one of a group of private companies set up to improve the housing conditions of the working class by building homes specifically for them. They were not charities and had to ensure that investments in them received a competitive rate of interest. The homes they built were of a higher standard than would normally be built for working men and women, with better sanitation and less overcrowding. The Improved Industrial Dwellings Company was one of the largest and most successful of such enterprises and by 1900 housed 30,000 people. The land they were built on was provided by a philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts, of whom we hear much more later in the walk.

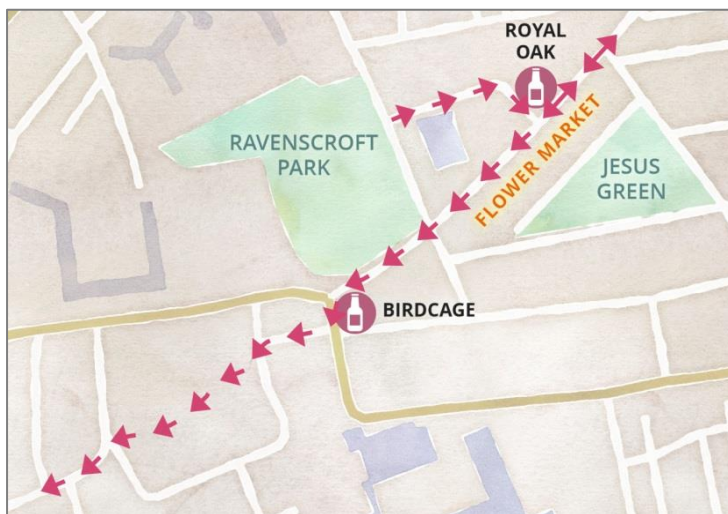
On the left you pass the **Columbia Market Nursery School**, which opened in 1930 – one of the first municipal nursery schools in Britain and now a listed building.

Cross over **Gascoigne Place** and then **Virginia Street** and **Chambord Street** – on your left there's an enormous multi-storey apartment building, which to me seems to be rather out of place.

On Sunday mornings the street is already likely to be busy with people going to or from the flower market – which you will probably be able to see from here.

Cross over before you reach the mini roundabout and **the Birdcage pub** – (**ignore the sign that points straight ahead to the Columbia Road Flower Market**) – and instead **fork left** along the path through the **Ravenscroft Park**, then after a few yards take the right fork, which takes you into Ravenscroft Road, where we **turn left**, walking past the large, red brick-built school.

**Turn right** down the side of the school into **Ezra Street**. Pass a well-restored warehouse building, now offices and studios but still with the hoists, gantry and pulleys that once hauled goods up to the higher floors. Also on the left there's often small Sunday vintage and bric-a-brac market.



Route map 2

At the end of this short stretch of **Ezra Street** there are two little cafés/coffee shops, one still with an old sign above it saying, 'Printers & Stationers'.

**Turn up to the right here** – on the corner you'll see the rear garden of the highly popular, particularly on Sundays, **Royal Oak pub**, which has been here since 1923. On Sundays there's often an open-air barbecue here, as well as an oyster stall.

**At the top turn left and walk past the front of the pub** and make your way to the end of the market, **where I suggest you cross over** and make your way back down the other side of Columbia Road. Most Sundays this little stretch is very crowded, though how busy will depend on

when you visit – obviously at certain times of the year (Christmas for example) it can be extremely busy.

Columbia Road was originally a pathway along which sheep and cattle were driven en route to Smithfield Market.

Much of the surrounding land was comprised of clay which for many years was used for making the local brick. Once the clay had been exhausted the land became a dumping ground for rubbish, which filled in the gaps left by the clay.

### **The market**

This was originally a Saturday market that primarily sold food, but as the number of Jewish immigrants continued to grow, it was moved to a Sunday to enable them to work and shop here. This change was also popular with traders from the Spitalfields and Covent Garden markets, as it meant they were able to bring their perishable fruit and vegetables that hadn't sold on a Saturday.

Something I find fascinating is that an enormous and extravagant Gothic-styled building was erected here in the 19th century that besides having room for 400 indoor stalls, also had accommodation for workers, swimming baths and even a church. Called the Columbia Market, it was the idea of an extremely wealthy lady, who because of her work in helping the people of the slums of East London, was given the title of 'Queen of the Poor'. I have written more about her, the work she did and the background to this amazing building in the appendix.

The market was badly affected during the Second World War, not only because of rationing, but as the result of a terrible disaster on the 7th September 1940, when it was hit by a large bomb. It was literally a 'direct hit', going straight down the ventilation shaft of a bomb shelter that had been built under the market, and a number of people were killed and injured.

(I have read an account of it that was written by someone who was in the shelter and seriously injured when the bomb hit. At the time he was just a young boy and the account he wrote later is so poignant that I have reprinted some of it in the **appendix**.)

Indeed, it wasn't until the 1960s that the market began to regain its popularity and over time it gradually became the flower market we see today, helped it is said by the increasing popularity of televised gardening programmes.

The market is a fascinating street full of stalls selling bucketfuls of beautiful flowers, houseplants, ferns, cacti, shrubs, bulbs. Some of the stalls, or pitches, have been handed down by generations of the same family – one stallholder is said to have been selling flowers here since 1949 – and there is a long waiting list of people who'd like to have one.

Apparently, the popularity of flowers and plants in London's East End is partly a result of the Huguenots who had moved here from France in the 17th century.

As it's unlikely that you will be buying much in the way of flowers or plants – at least not if you are planning on finishing the walk – then I suggest you might also like to walk back along the pavement behind the stalls and explore the row of interesting and unusual shops.

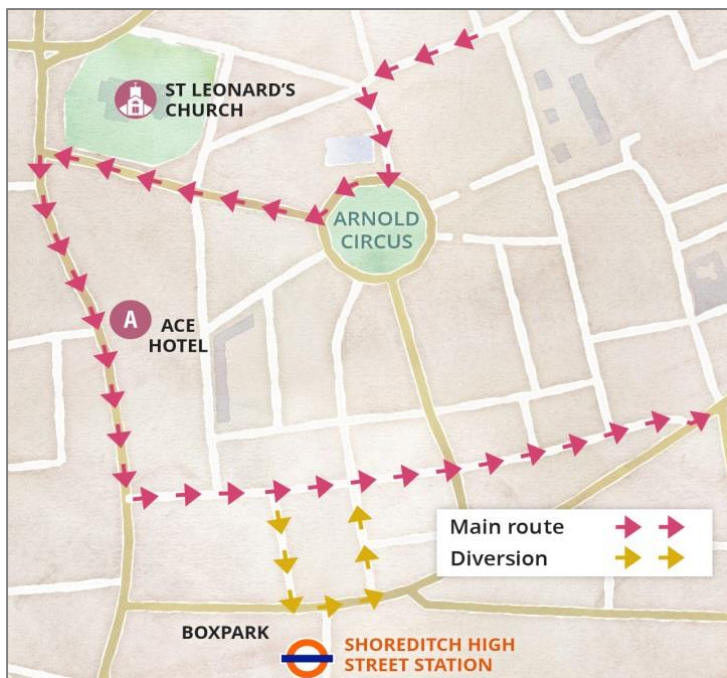
They had been built in the 1860s and while some served the neighbourhood's residents, others were used by local people who worked in the local furniture and upholstery trade that was

linked to the many wood turning and milling factories in the area. Most of these shops had been closed for many years, but the increase in the popularity of the market has resulted in them being reopened. Now selling vintage fashion, antiques, art and trendy gifts, many only open on Sundays, although recently I have noticed more opening on Saturdays and some even during the week.

When you have finished browsing, then carry on down Columbia Road, until you reach **The Birdcage** (the pub's name comes as a result of the Huguenot immigrants, besides liking flowers, also having something of a passion for owning caged songbirds).

At the mini-roundabout, turn left down **Gosset Street**, cross over at the pedestrian crossing and after just five yards turn first right down the pedestrianised lane. Cross over **Chambord Street** and continue down the narrow lane ahead until you reach **Virginia Road** – the route we take is virtually straight ahead down Virginia Road, which now bends around. Walk on down it, keeping the tiny park on your left.

Carry on down Virginia Road, passing Swanfield Street on your left and Gascoigne Street on the right.



Route map 3

At the next junction **turn left** into **Hocker Street** – the sign is on the wall of the flats on your left – but before you do, notice in the narrow road that forks to your right, the interesting ironwork on the houses.

When you reach **the bottom of Hocker Street** you can't miss **Arnold Circus**. It's the centre of the Boundary Estate, with an unusual circular raised garden, complete with an old-fashioned bandstand. (And as an aside, it was built on top of rubble from the demolished slums that I refer to in just a moment.)

Walk up the steps and take a look, as from here you get a good view of the area and can appreciate how the architect had planned for these streets to run off in a radial pattern to make it more aesthetically pleasing.

As you stand on the raised garden, you might like to reflect that this was once the centre of what were said to have been the worst slums in London. It later became one of the world's first social housing estates and the apartment buildings that were built then still stand around here today.

Now called the **Boundary Estate**, it was previously known as the **Old Nichol**, which some said was after 'Old Nick', the devil. Described as a maze of rotting streets, lined by squalid and decayed houses, their facilities were either primitive or non-existent – for example, running water was said to have only been available for only 10 to 15 minutes a day.

"Many of these houses were below pavement level and so flooded when it rained. In cold weather – and warmth was a luxury in the Old Nichol – broken panes were blocked up with anything that came to hand: newspapers, rags, sometimes old hats. In winter, even the water jugs iced over. Mowbray lived with his wife and four children in a little room in Boundary Street, which marked the border between Bethnal Green and Shoreditch. In the two-room tenement in Anne Court, just around the corner from where Mowbray lived, the meagre fire burning in the grate drew moisture out of the saturated plaster, creating wisps of fog inside the house. In the Old Nichol, there was no escape from the gloom. Its two tiny rooms were home to a married couple and six children, but there were no beds.

"Families slept in one bed, washed together and regularly saw one another naked. The children watched their elders having sex. Five out of every six infants to die in Bethnal Green were in homes where the whole family shared a bed and were suffocated. Coroners attributed most of these deaths to 'overlying', during which a sleeping parent or sibling rolled onto the infant and accidentally smothered it. Others, however, suspected that many were intentionally suffocated, by desperate mothers with too many mouths to feed."

I have taken the above paragraphs from a remarkable book by Sarah Wise called *The Blackest Streets*, and I have put further excerpts, and more details of the book, in the **appendix**.

Thanks to social reformers, one of whom in 1850 wrote a newspaper article describing the appalling conditions in the Old Nichol, and another being Charles Booth who had produced a map showing the levels of poverty in the individual streets of London, the authorities were forced into action. In 1894 they demolished around fifteen acres of slums and in their place built the sturdy houses and wide, tree-lined streets that radiate from Arnold Circus as we stand here today.

I have written more about both the Old Nichol and the subsequent Boundary Estate in the **appendix**.

**Leave Arnold Circus via Calvert Avenue**, the road leading off to the right (from Hocker Street where you entered). It has shops on both sides, one being the Boundary Estate's community association shop and laundrette, though some of other shops are now quite 'trendy'.

As you walk down Calvert Avenue you can't miss the high steeple of the imposing **St Leonard's Shoreditch Church** – if you'd like to take a look inside then you need to walk around to the front, actually on Shoreditch High Street, as there's no access from the churchyard at the rear. The church is currently undergoing a major refurbishment, which hopefully will make the entrance at the front a little more inviting than it does at present.

The Grade I listed St Leonard's Church is rather plain, almost austere, inside. The original church was built by the Anglo-Saxons and later demolished and rebuilt by the Normans. After collapsing in the 18th century it was rebuilt again, which is the church we see today. Many major renovations have taken place over the past few years, and more repairs are currently taking place on the steeple.

Due to its associations with William Shakespeare, who at one time lived close by, as well as close proximity to England's first theatre, it became known as the Actors' Church. Its reputation must have already been known in the 16th century, as William Somers, Henry VIII's court jester, was buried here in 1560.

It's recently been used as 'St Saviour in the Marshes' in the 'Rev.' television programme and has been known to children for many years in the nursery rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons' – the bells here are said to chime, 'When I grow rich, say the bells of Shoreditch'.

I have written a little more about the church in the **appendix**.

At the very end of Calvert Avenue, notice the little wooden structure beside the pavement – until very recently this was 'Syd's Original Coffee Stall' that had been here since 1919, which the old sign on the roof explains.

We turn left down the extremely busy **Shoreditch High Street** – but as you do notice some of the old commercial buildings on the other side of the road that have been particularly well preserved – especially the 'Wells & Company Commercial Iron Works' – or at least its upper floors.

**Shoreditch** was once at the junction of six major roads that the Romans had built which led to various strategic cities across England. You could travel from here to Bath, Chester, Chichester, Colchester, Lincoln and York. The High Street, where we are now, used to be called Ermine Street and was an important Roman road that started at Bishopsgate, one of the entrance gates into the walled City of London, and ran all the way to York. It's position, together with having fresh water from the River Walbrook that rises immediately outside of the front of the church, (it eventually flows into the Thames in the City), resulted in it becoming the site of a large Roman army camp.

After the Romans, the Anglo Saxons built a small settlement here, and a church on what is now the site of St Leonard's. For many years Shoreditch remained just a small hamlet set in open countryside with just a few houses on either side of what is now the High Street.

While the City of Westminster became the centre of government and the City of London the hub of commercial activity, Shoreditch remained just a village. Its growth was likely to have been held back because the land to the west was wet and marshy, partly because the River Walbrook would regularly overflow onto the adjacent land. However, with London so close, Shoreditch eventually began to grow, and for a while became a gathering place for those who weren't allowed to carry out their trade or activities within the city walls. This led to the area becoming notorious for its brothels and gambling houses. Its growth was later spurred on by the arrival of many waves of immigrants who settled in the east of London, something that has continued for several hundred years and still continues to this day.

Today Shoreditch has become very popular with young professionals, particularly those in the arts, fashion and media world, which has not only had a huge impact on house prices, but also on the facilities in the area, with many trendy shops, bars, restaurants, etc., opening.



After 100 yards look out for the clock on a building on your left – it's above a flight of steps. This is the entrance to the **Ace Hotel** – though it doesn't look anything like a hotel, inside or out. Take a look inside and you'll see what I mean. The reception 'desk' is more like a shop, whilst most of the ground floor is open plan, with easy chairs and a very long table where people sit and work on their laptops. There's a bar at the rear, whilst on the left is a coffee shop/cafeteria. And whilst you might think it's a relatively inexpensive place to stay, it isn't. This is 'yuppie millennial' (or whatever the correct word is these days) territory after all!

Ahead you can see the new railway bridge that spans Shoreditch High Street. As an aside for anybody interested in such things, the 120-foot-long and 350 ton 'bowstring arch' steel bridge was assembled in a nearby railway goods yard and was lifted into place in one piece, using the largest mobile crane in Britain.

After 200 yards you pass Dishoom on your left. This is the hugely popular Bombay dining experience (the entrance is behind the building in Boundary Passage, where like other branches of this chain there are usually long queues outside waiting to get a table).

Turn left into **Redchurch Street**. Once again, like much of the area, it has seen a considerable transformation, with this once run-down, semi industrial street now hosting numerous 'cutting edge' shops, bars and restaurants. Well, the first half of it is anyway – as you will see shortly, the other end is still 'waiting for it to happen'.

Cross over **Boundary Street** – and on the corner, with just a small, discrete entrance under a glass canopy, is Sir Terence Conran's '**Boundary Project**'. In what had previously been an industrial building he created a 12-room 'designer' hotel, with a café-bar in the basement (they use the word subterranean restaurant), another that is more for 'fine-dining' and on the roof a highly recommended outdoor garden and grill. It opened in 2009 and is all very lovely – but certainly not cheap.

The old industrial buildings on the other side of the street have also fortunately escaped demolition, though with considerable internal restoration.

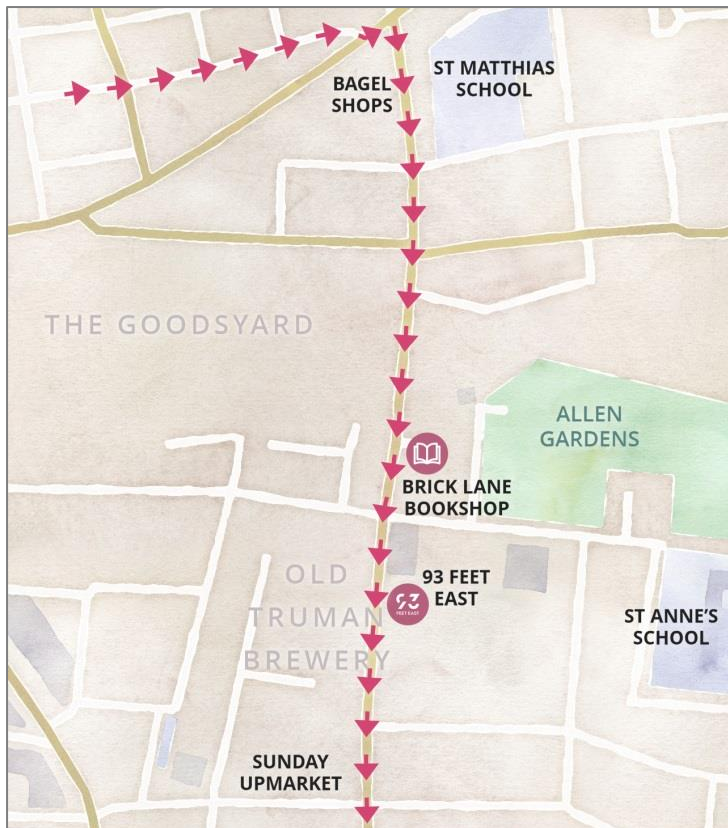
*You now have a short (just a few hundred yards) optional diversion here, which if you want to skip you can continue on along Redchurch Street and then pick up the walk again.*

### **Optional diversion**

If you want to take a look at Boxpark Shoreditch, a concept that's spreading to other parts of London, and indeed other cities in the world, then **turn right down Ebor Street** (the sign is hard to see). Much of the six-storey warehouse on the right has been renovated and now hosts the '**Shoreditch House**', one of the highly exclusive, members only converted 'Club Houses' of the famous Soho House Group. It has a rooftop pool and restaurant, a spa, gym and even its own library and is another example of how this previously rundown area of London has become so 'trendy'.

Facing you at the bottom of Ebor Street and on the other side of Bethnal Green Road is the **Boxpark**. It's a 'pop-up' mall on two levels created out of sixty refurbished shipping containers. Erected under the elevated section of the Shoreditch High Street Overground station, it contains some twenty bars and restaurants and nearly thirty shops. Said to be the first of its kind in the world, it opened 2011.

Turn left along **Bethnal Green Road** and then take the first left up **Chance Street**. At the top turn right and continue along **Redchurch Street**, passing several more 'contemporary' shops. Cross **Club Row** and then **Turville Street**. (I particularly like the restored 'Labour & Wait' shop at number 85 on the corner.)



Route map 4

Continue on to the end of Redchurch Street – from here on it is generally less gentrified, and still has a number of older and in places rather rundown buildings. At the end, where Redchurch Street joins **Bethnal Green Road** – cross over at the pedestrian lights and walk down **Brick Lane** which is over on the right.

Until recently much of **Brick Lane** could be probably be best described as 'shabby'. For many years it was home to a number of clothing manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, particularly those dealing in leather. This is no longer the case, as shops, cafés and bars catering for the east London 'trendy millennials' have been moving in for some time, though as you will shortly see, there are still several leather goods shops here, something I make mention of shortly.

Of course, as I have just mentioned, if you say 'Brick Lane' to many people they'll immediately think of curry restaurants. Over the past 25 years or so, the middle section of Brick Lane has built up a huge reputation for the place to go for a curry, and as you will see, there is an enormous choice.

On weekdays, the stretch above 'Curry Row' can be somewhat dreary and uninteresting but, presuming you're here on a Sunday, you can see Brick Lane at its liveliest and best.

The unique character of the area, as well as Spitalfields and indeed the East End of London, has been shaped by continuous waves of immigration, something that began with the Huguenots

escaping persecution in France in the 16th century, followed by Irish people escaping famine, Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe and, from the 1950s onwards, Muslim Bengalis. And it still attracts both economic migrants and persecuted refugees to this day.

I have written a little more in the **appendix** about how the immigration has influenced the area over the past few centuries, particularly its continuing association with the 'rag trade'.

Brick Lane was originally called 'Whitechapel Lane' and the surrounding area, which we walk through next was known as Spitalfields. Both were outside of the City of London and prior to the Great Fire of London, mainly just open countryside.

After the devastating fire in 1666, it became illegal for houses to be built of wood in order to try and prevent such a fire reoccurring, which meant they now had to be built of stone or brick and as so much of the City had been destroyed, suddenly vast numbers of bricks were required. As a result, the demand for good quality London clay soared, and a supply was soon discovered in the ground around Whitechapel Lane. A kiln to fire the clay and produce bricks was built and Whitechapel Lane soon became known as 'Brick Lane'.

The famous author Daniel Defoe, (writer for example of Robinson Crusoe), political pamphleteer, publicist and much more, was born in 1660 and recalled in his childhood Brick Lane as being "just a deep, dirty road frequented chiefly by carts fetching bricks into Whitechapel".

As London grew and people began to move out of the crowded City, so the area around Spitalfields began to be developed, with streets and houses being built on what were previously just fields. Brick Lane further developed when the Truman's brewery opened in the early 1700s, about which I explain more shortly.

However, like much of London's East End, the area remained very poor. Part of the reason was due to the prevailing westerly winds, which would blow the soot, smoke, dirt and grime from the rest of London eastwards. As the industrial revolution proceeded, this could often make the East End a rather unpleasant place to live. (This was also the case with the east side of many of Britain's cities.)

However, the low cost of accommodation and land did make the area more attractive to immigrants, who would often arrive in England with just the clothes they were wearing. They would arrive, find somewhere to live (though often in cramped and unpleasant conditions to start with), and find work. Over time, many would begin to 'make good' and move on to the 'better' areas of London and its environs. This constant movement enabled other, newly arrived immigrants, to take their place and the cycle would repeat itself.

Indeed, the East End of London has always been known as a 'melting pot' of people from across the world. Its proximity to London's docks, the country's leading port and where thousands of ships would arrive each year from across the world, was also a major factor in the level of immigration.

**Start walking down Brick Lane.** The first couple of hundred yards are often busy due to two unique London East End institutions – its bagel shops. There are two here, and they are just a few yards apart. The first is the **Beigel Bake**, known as the 'white one', which opened in the mid-1970s.

However, the second one – **The Brick Lane Beigel Shop**, which is known by locals as the 'yellow one' – opened as long ago as 1855. They are both open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, (they

say they don't even have doors!) and I've never yet seen either shop without customers inside – even in the early hours of the morning they can be really busy. Indeed, the 'yellow one' says it produces over 7,000 bagels a day.

Bagels, known as the 'roll with a hole', are very much a Jewish institution and were brought to London by Jewish immigrants in the 1800s. According to a book called 'The Bagel: The Surprising History of a Modest Bread', by Maria Balinska, they go back to at least the 17th century and there are reports of them being baked in various forms in countries as diverse as Poland, Turkey and Italy.

What makes them so distinctive is that they are boiled in water before they are baked. The ingredients are flour, sugar, salt and yeast and the process, including soaking them in boiling water before they are baked, takes about two and a half hours. The actual baking time is said to be very precise – according to one article I read it's exactly 22½ minutes.

If you decide to buy one, then make up your mind precisely what you want to order before you join the queue. This is fast food at its fastest. The speed at which they dispense the bagels is truly astonishing and what they won't put up with is anybody asking questions or being indecisive. So decide exactly what you want first and get your money ready before you join the queue!

Begin by deciding whether you want a plain bagel, poppy seeded or rye. Then the fillings – the two most popular fillings are either smoked salmon and cream cheese or 'salt beef'. The latter is my personal favourite – they are normally served with English mustard and pickle, and you'll be astonished at just how much beef you get. However, eating it whilst standing at the little side counter without getting it all down you is quite an art.

Cross over **Bacon Street** (which is an odd name, seeing as for many years the majority of the population were Jewish and now predominately Muslim). As you can see, there is a real mix of shops here – a number of them still selling the leatherwear products that I mentioned before, though many for wholesale customers.

At the 'staggered' junction with **Sclater Street** on your right and **Cheshire Street** on the left, look down the latter and you'll see a long line of attractive restored terraced houses. This is a particularly good example of how quickly areas can become popular and fashionable and a number of once empty shops have been renovated. (Many now sell vintage clothing and I think it could easily be renamed 'Vintage Street!')

And I'll just mention that from **Club Row**, which we crossed earlier, all the way down to **Sclater Street**, where we are now, there used to be a live animal market. Said to have originally been where the Huguenot's would come to buy their songbirds, it grew over the years, eventually selling everything from wild animals – monkeys through to even lion cubs – to the more mundane chickens, dogs, cats and rabbits. It lasted for over 150 years, but fortunately it was closed following a campaign by the RSPCA in the early 1980s.

On the corner is one of the few remaining family owned leather wholesale and retailers, Bashir & Sons, who've been here for over 40 years. Not so long ago, almost all the shops north of the railway bridge in Brick Lane sold leather jackets and bags that were manufactured locally, but now there are only a handful of these businesses left. I was quite intrigued by the thought of Brick Lane being a centre of the leather trade and how it came about, and after a bit of digging I found a very interesting article on the Spitalfields Life website ... part of which I've copied and put into the **appendix**.

Pass under the railway bridge (the line it carried was abandoned for many years, reopening just a few years ago as part of the London Overground and which crosses Shoreditch High Street on the new bridge we saw earlier).

A few yards further on the road crosses over the District line underground and in the row of shops on the left is the **Brick Lane Bookshop**, which had opened elsewhere in the East End in 1977 but later moved here. Besides having a great selection of books, it has always been a centre for writers with a reputation for its 'book reading' events. Authors including Iain Sinclair, Beryl Bainbridge, Lionel Shriver, Jennifer Worth, Sarah Wise amongst many others have performed guest readings of their books in the shop.

Ahead you will now be able to see the old **Truman Brewery** buildings– certainly its tall chimney, which, like most of the complex, has fortunately been preserved. From here on the buildings on both sides of the road were once part of the sprawling brewery.

Ben Truman opened his **Black Eagle Brewery** in the 1720s and over the years it grew, both organically and by mergers and takeovers, to become Truman, Hanbury & Buxton, which was at one time the world's largest brewery. Part of its success was the brewing of porter, which for a time became one of Britain's most popular beers.

Porter was a heavily hopped beer made from dark brown malts – and I love how the name is said to have come about. It was as a result of the landlord of a local pub asking the brewery to supply the beer ready mixed, (until then pub owners often had to mix different beers to produce one that was popular for their customers). His customers so liked this particular beer – and they were mainly market porters, so it was named after them.

The advantage of porter was that it could be mass produced, and by the middle of the 18th century Truman's were brewing vast quantities of it. It was even said to be George Washington's favourite beer. Eventually, though, demand dropped as beer drinkers discovered stout, then pale ales and later the pilsner beers.

The brewery finally closed in 1989 and its buildings are now used for what is described as the "East End's revolutionary arts and media quarter, home to a hive of creative businesses as well as independent shops, galleries, bars and restaurants." It's also used for events, exhibitions and of course its markets.

And as with Petticoat Lane, the last market we visit on this walk, the reason it's held on Sundays and not a Saturdays, as most markets are in in Britain, was because many of the stall holders and their customers were Jewish – and of course Saturday is their holy day.

Within the various Truman's Brewery buildings there are five quite distinct markets, and that's in addition to the many street stalls that you will already have passed as you've walked down Brick Lane. The five markets are the original Upmarket, the Vintage Market, Backyard Market, the Tea Rooms and the Boiler House.

Halfway along the building on your left, which was previously the Boiler House, there's the popular Vegan Market, open on Saturdays and Sundays.

A few yards more yards further along you'll see what is known as 'Paradise Alley', where you'll find the entrance to the popular club called 93 Feet East.

Established in 1999 as a 'social hub and music destination', **93 Feet East** has played host to the likes of Radiohead, Groove Armada, The White Stripes and Bombay Bicycle Club.

Their website and Facebook page says, "It has become a rite of passage for any dance music fan with a great selection of respected brands hosting takeovers throughout the years. Enzo Siragusa's infamous residency Fuse really cemented itself as one of the capital's leading parties during its time at 93 Feet East, while the hugely popular Secretsundaze began its longstanding trajectory in the early 2000s. Taking form as a real social hub and music destination that's built a reputation as one of the capital's iconic venues in live music and dance, as well as just being a great place to have a drink and meet friends, 93 Feet East is open throughout the week and late into the weekends. It boasts two large rooms, an outside terrace area and more spaces within the venue, it is a versatile space with high tech lighting, sound and branding opportunities that make it fully functional for club shows, live events, private hire, exhibitions and launches. Its refurbishment boasts a d&b sound system throughout and a welcoming, yet raw and industrial decor, with the space continuing to act as a creative hub for international musicians and DJs moving forward." So now you know!

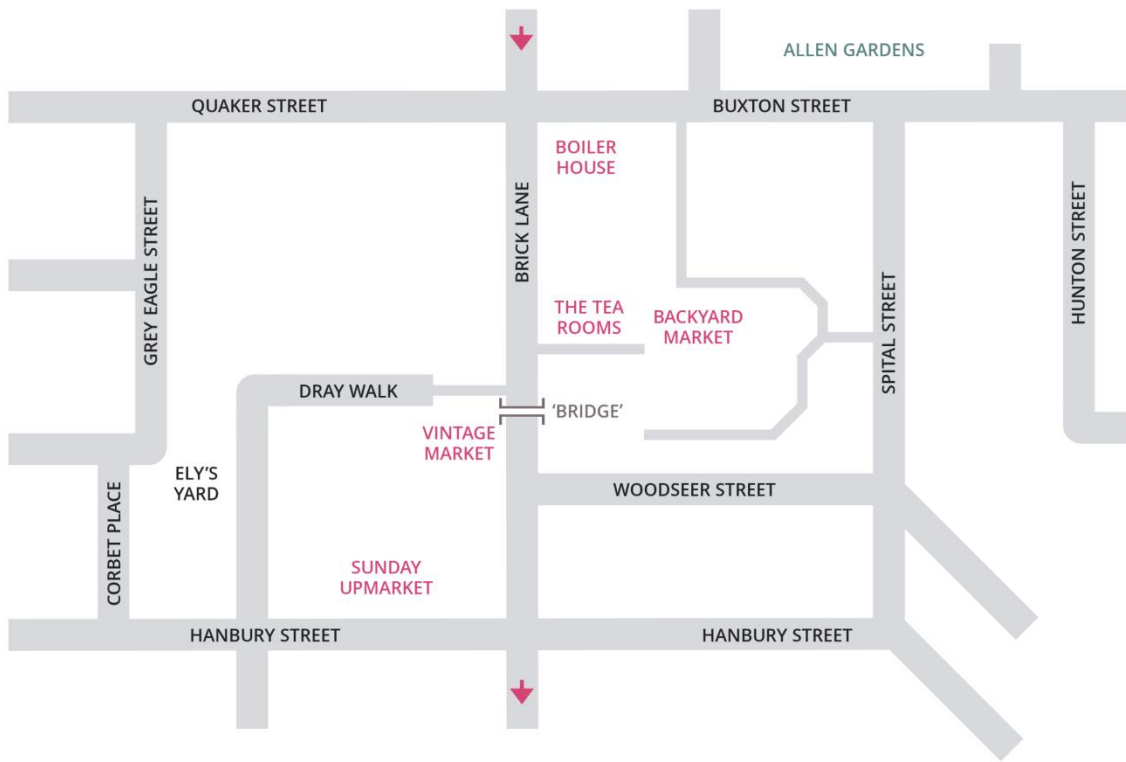
Finally, the lane at the end of the building is the entrance to the **Backyard Market**.

On your right, at the end of the long open courtyard that fronts what was another part of the brewery, you'll see a small brick building with a doorway (it shows its Number 91) and an original sign explains it was once the registered office of Truman's Brewery.

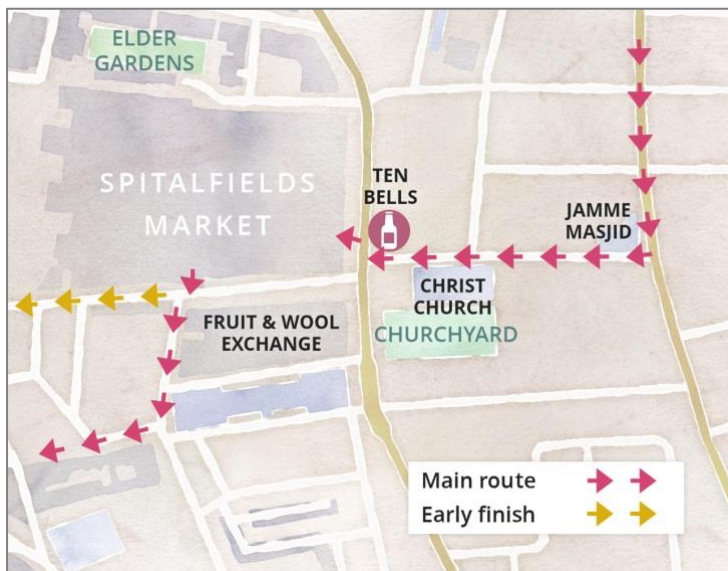
Also on the right, and immediately before the overhead bridge that used to connect the two parts of the brewery buildings, is the **Dray Walk**, so named because this was where the drays would be loaded with beer barrels for distribution around London. It is now home to a number of popular bars and music venues including the well-known 'Big Chill', and 'Rough Trade'. (And if you don't know what they are, then you're too old to go in!) At the top of the lane there's a large open square with more old brewery buildings, some of which are used for the art, fashion and design exhibitions of the students of various colleges and universities around the country.

**Walk under the 'bridge'** and the small doorway in the next building on your right leads down to the basement **Vintage Market**. With over forty stalls, it's open every day of the week.

Then just a few yards ahead, again on your right and with an enormous glass frontage, is the famous **Sunday Upmarket**. It's been here for over fifteen years and attracts big crowds. Time Out magazine described it as the 'best market for new designers', and many of the stalls are certainly run by 'creative' types. The range is huge - everything from vintage to cutting edge fashion, accessories, quirky crafts and interiors, art, plenty of old vinyl - and of course a huge range of food stalls featuring choices from all over the world in the enormous food hall. The Independent newspaper put it in their 'Top 50 Cheap Eats'.



Simplified map of the Truman Markets



Route map 5

### Now things change ...

Once you have crossed **Hanbury Street** you are in the stretch of Brick Lane that is renowned for its '**curry houses**' and known locally as '**Banglatown**'. (The majority of the 'Indian restaurants' in Brick Lane are not actually Indian but run by Bengalis. The first Bengalis began to arrive here following the 1947 partition of the Indian sub-continent, but many more came later from the

Sylhet area of northern Bangladesh. However, the majority are of Bangladeshi descent and the area around Brick Lane is said to have the highest concentration of Bangladeshi Muslims in Britain.)

I do find it rather amusing that as you walk past the line of restaurants you'll struggle to find one that hasn't won an award for Best Curry, Best Chef, Best Restaurant, Best Food, Best Menu ... They all have their various 'awards' hanging over their doorways or displayed across their fascias or windows ... seemingly not bothered that in small print some of the 'awards' were given many years ago. But what I have noticed more recently is that there are now one or two restaurants that don't serve 'Indian' food, though without doubt it is still 'Curry Row'.

It's difficult to avoid the 'tikka touts' outside each restaurant, each saying that theirs is the best ... offering free poppadums, bhajis, drinks ... anything to get you in. However, it's all good natured, and you need to do no more than just give a nod and a thank you as you carry on past. (And the longer you stand outside a restaurant, debating on whether to go in or not, the more freebies are likely to be offered!)

When you reach **Princelet Street** look down to the right where you can see the first of several streets of preserved Huguenot houses. This was where many Huguenots settled after fleeing religious persecution in France in the 17th century, which I explain more about when we walk through the area shortly.

After another 50 yards or so you come to the **Brick Lane Jamme Masjid** with a highly visible 'tower' in front of it. The 'tower' is actually a 90ft tall illuminated, stainless steel minaret, which when it was erected in 2009 was welcomed by some, but equally caused considerable dissent among others.

What is fascinating is the number of religions that have used this building over the past three centuries or so – Huguenot Protestants, Wesleyans, Jews, Methodists and now Muslims.

But first, more about the mosque. It can accommodate up to 3,200 worshippers and was once the most important mosque in London and known then as the 'Great Mosque'. This changed in 1978 when the London Central Mosque opened in Regent's Park. As more Muslims moved into London's East End another mosque, which became known as the East End Mosque, opened in 1985 in the nearby Whitechapel Road.

The building that is now a mosque opened in 1743 as *La Neuve Eglise*, a French Protestant chapel. It was built by the French Huguenot immigrants who had fled Catholic France because of the persecution they were suffering because of their Protestant faith. Known as the 'Protestant Dissenters', they weren't exactly welcomed by the Church of England and so built their own chapels.

In 1809, after most of the Huguenots had moved away, it became a Wesleyan Chapel and used by an organisation called the 'London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews'. Perhaps not surprisingly, they didn't last long and just ten years later, in 1819, it became a Methodist chapel.

By the late 1880s there had been a huge influx of Jewish immigrants into the area, and in 1898 it became the 'Spitalfields Great Synagogue', known more officially as the *Machzike Hadath*. Then by 1970, many of those Jews had prospered and moved to various areas of North London and the synagogue moved to Golders Green.



However, the building wasn't empty for long as just six years later, in 1976, and with so many Bengali Muslims moving to the area, it became a mosque.

Brick Lane now becomes rather less touristy, and **we turn right along the side of the mosque into Fournier Street.**

Fournier Street has some of the best-preserved Huguenot houses, though only a few years ago many were derelict and some even in danger of collapsing. However, most have been renovated and are now Grade II listed, of which Number 14 is a particularly good example. It's a wide, five storey townhouse that is considered to be one of the finest Georgian houses in Spitalfields. It was built in 1725 by the original owner, who 'being joiner and cabinet maker, installed an exceptional oak staircase and timber panelling in the principal rooms'. However, when the architects began work on the restoration of the house, it was said to have been in danger of collapse. A steel structure was 'threaded within the existing historic elements to minimise the impact of any modern interventions.' I checked online to get an idea of its current value and discovered it's just under £3 million. And in late 2019 another renovated Grade II listed house in the adjacent Princelet Street was on the market for an amazing £4.75 million.

After you cross **Wilkes Street**, the final row of twelve houses on the right-hand side are also particularly interesting. Notice Number 11 and next-door Number 11½! Their 'grimy appearance' seems to add to the atmosphere. Indeed, I love walking down this street at night, when thanks to the dim, subdued lighting you can almost imagine you have stepped back in time.

I particularly like **Number 5**. It's actually a little antique and curio shop and art gallery that also serves coffee and cakes and which Fiona, the delightful owner who I've had the pleasure to meet and chat with, says she bakes herself. Apparently, when she bought the house in 2000, it was almost derelict, as indeed a number of the houses in Spitalfields were – it was simply not somewhere people wanted to live. Now they are extremely desirable – and expensive!

Until recently Fiona used to let out her upstairs apartment for those who wish to experience staying in Spitalfields, but as she explained to me, there was simply too much work involved and so, sadly, she won't be doing that anymore. However, the shop is generally open from Mondays through to Saturdays.

On your left you certainly won't have missed the magnificent **Christ Church Spitalfields**, which was built by the Baroque-influenced architect Nicholas Hawksmoor in 1729. As with several of Hawksmoor's churches, it is in a very different style to most other churches that were built around that time.

The architect of Christ Church Spitalfields was Nicholas Hawksmoor (1661 – 1736), who had been a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren and at one time his assistant. He was chosen to build six of the twelve new churches that had been authorised by Parliament, as a result of concerns that more were needed to satisfy the growing population of London. However, only six were eventually built and besides Christ Church, they included several others in London's East End, one in Bloomsbury and another in Greenwich.

Despite its magnificent architecture, as the area of Spitalfields went into decline, the church fell into a serious state of disrepair and by the late 1950s it eventually closed. There were plans for it to be demolished, but fortunately a group of conservationists, helped by donations from English Heritage and the Lottery Fund managed to raise sufficient money to save it and, after many years of hard work, it reopened in 2004.

## **The top of Fournier Street brings you out on the very busy Commercial Street.**

On the corner is the 18th century **Ten Bells**, which for a time was known as the 'Jack the Ripper pub', because it was acknowledged locally that 'Jack' used this place to select his victims.

Jack's final victim, a 25-year old woman by the name of Mary Kelly, left the Ten Bells on the 9th November 1888, and her body, mutilated as the others had been, was found close by the next morning. And another of the Ripper's victims, Annie Chapman, used to 'ply her trade as a prostitute' outside of the pub. And to add to the connection, for a while afterwards the staff who lived in the pub would tell how at night they would dream of meeting a ghostly old man in Victorian clothes, and when they awoke they would turn over and find him lying next to them in the bed. Fortunately, as soon as they shouted out, he would disappear.

The film adaption of the book *From Hell*, by Alan Moore, shows Inspector Frederick Abberline (played by Johnny Depp) having a drink with Mary Kelly (played by Heather Graham) in the pub.

And a real odd connection, one of the past landlords of the pub (in the 1880s) was the great-great-grandfather of Jamie Oliver, of restaurant fame, and he was shown meeting the current landlord in his television series 'Jamie's Great Britain'.

We are now in the area of Spitalfields, which has had a long and fascinating history. It lay just outside the walls of the City of London and grew up around a priory and hospital known as the 'Blessed Virgin Mary without Bishopsgate'\*, which over time just became known as St Mary of the 'Spital'. The 'hospital' was said to have been the biggest in medieval London, accommodating around 150 patients.

*\* 'without Bishopsgate' meant that it lay outside of the boundary of the ward of Bishopsgate.*

During Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, when he attempted to rid the country of the Catholic religion by shutting down the monasteries and priories, both St Mary's as well as the hospital were closed. The fields it had been built on gradually became known as the 'Spital Fields', which then gave its name to the market that opened here in the 17th century – and here we are heading now.

Directly opposite the **Ten Bells** pub, on the other side of **Commercial Street**, is the famous and now restored **Old Spitalfields Market**.

Cross over at the light-controlled pedestrian crossing and walk into market through its gated entrance.

Unlike many London markets, **Spitalfields Market** is open daily, though Sunday is by far the most popular. There are various weekly 'themed' markets including Antiques and Collectables on a Thursday and Fashion on Fridays. Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays are general market days when there's a range of everything from art, vinyl, fashion. In addition, there is a big range of excellent food stalls and around the market are a number of 'high-end' speciality shops selling everything from fashion, jewellery, accessories and even homeware.

There are around 88 actual market stalls, 44 shops and restaurants and 25 'food stalls' within this restored Victorian market, and I think it's worth pointing out that unlike some markets, (Petticoat Lane being a good example) Spitalfields has a high reputation for the quality of its traders and the products they sell.

There has been a market here since 1682, when Charles II gave a licence that allowed 'fowl, flesh and roots' to be sold. In 1876 a Victorian Market Hall, much of which has been preserved and we see today, was built to accommodate what had become one of London's busiest fruit and vegetable markets. So much so that in 1991 it was moved to a new site in Leyton, further to the east of London, where it became known as the 'New Spitalfields Market'. It was feared that the old market buildings would be demolished, but fortunately they weren't and for a number of years a 'flea market' took place here.

Then in 2005 a programme of renovation and regeneration took place, which was followed in 2017 by a much bigger programme. The task of redesigning the market and surrounding area was given to the renowned Foster+Partners architects, who managed to combine some of the original buildings with new shopping and public spaces. Since then the market's popularity and success has soared.

We will be leaving the market from the opposite end to where we've entered (at the top left of the building), but you may want to take a look around first, and if so, I've given a suggested route below.

From the entrance walk straight ahead for around 50 yards and then look to the left through the side entrance and on the other side of Brushfield Street you'll see a building with the words 'London Fruit Exchange' and 'London Wool Exchange' on its front. This was previously a major centre of the worldwide fruit, vegetable and wool trade but more recently it has been part of another major rebuilding project which I explain here.

When the original Fruit and Wool Exchange building opened here in 1929, Britain was still at the centre of much of the world's trade and this building operated as an 'Exchange', where auctions for the buying and selling of fruit, vegetables and wool were held. It was also the offices of the brokers and distributors. However, after the Spitalfields fruit and vegetable market moved away, much of the building became redundant, used only by various local independent businesses. As a result it became somewhat run down and in 2102 this prompted proposals for a major redevelopment of the site. This involved the demolition, not only of the Exchange, but of a number of other adjacent historic buildings, including the 'Gun Inn', a famous local pub where men from King Henry VIII's artillery regiment would 'sup ale' after gun practice.

There was outrage – not only were local residents and various conservation societies against the plans, but so were the local council. However, they were overruled, and the plans were passed by Boris Johnson, then the Mayor of London ... and what you see now are the new buildings.

For more information and plenty of photos, see the Gentle Author's ['So Long, Spitalfields Fruit & Wool Exchange' at Spitalfields Life](#).

**From here** I suggest you make your way diagonally across to the top right and walk through into the **second hall** – (a row of permanent restaurants divide the market hall into two halves). As you do, on the right you pass public toilets (and very well maintained they are too).

Once you've explored the second hall, then head over to the top left and leave via one of pedestrian exits at the beginning of the covered market walkway extension that has a row of permanent shops on the right. This will take you into **Brushfield Street** – you'll see the 'modern incarnation' of the Gun Inn on the other side and from here you can see the size of the redevelopment I mentioned earlier.

Cross over and walk up to the right – but first look back down the street for an excellent view of Christ Church.

Ahead of you now is a row of original terraced houses with shops or restaurants on the ground floor. I rather like the first one – **The English Restaurant** – a good name as the menu says it offers traditional ‘English fayre’. And according to the lettering on the woodwork under the windows, specialities include ‘ports, cheese platters, dinners, & old wines, shellfish, game in season, puddings ...’ – how very English is that?

We will turn left down Crispin Street which runs down the side of the English Restaurant – but you do have the opportunity to finish the walk here. (The walk continues through to Petticoat Lane and ends at Liverpool Street, taking approximately another 30 mins.)

If you do decide to end here, then carry on to the top of **Brushfield Street** where it joins Bishopsgate. Facing you on the other side of the road is the enormous **Broadgate** office development. **Turn left down Bishopsgate** and after a few hundred yards, you will see Liverpool Street station on the other side of the road. There are a number of bus stops for various routes on both sides of the road. (For more details on getting back to other parts of London from Liverpool Street, please see the end of the walk.)



Route map 6

If you would like to carry on with the walk and visit Petticoat Lane Market, whilst still ending up at Liverpool Street station, then **turn left into Crispin Street**.

And as you turn left, look up to the top of the building on your right at the start of Crispin Street and you will probably be able to make out a sign that says, ‘Percy Dalton, (London) Ltd, Nut Importers and Roasters’.

Percy left school when he was just 14 years old and went to work selling fruit and vegetables from a barrow in the East End. He did well enough to be able to afford to take a pitch here at

Spitalfields Market and then started experimenting with cooking peanuts – known then as monkey nuts, which those of us of a certain age will probably remember.

According to an article on the *Jewish Lives Project* website, he found a way of roasting the nuts that improved their flavour without them drying out. He imported these 'superior nuts' from farmers in Israel and he sold them in packs, known as Percy Dalton's Monkeys, across London. When Percy retired in 1975, he was the largest independent dealer in nut kernels in Britain and his sons took over the business.

And just a couple of doors down on the right at number 46, notice the old advertising signs that say, 'Donovan Bros – The noted house for Paper Bags' – and various other advertising signs promoting 'florists' packing tissue, greaseproofs, coloured papers' and much more.

Pass the large three-storey Victorian brick building on the right that was once a Night Refuge and Home for Deserving Men, Women and Children. It was a Roman Catholic charitable institution that opened here in 1868 and finally closed in the 1970s. Run by the Sisters of Mercy, it provided accommodation for 300 women and children and 50 men as well as a convent for the sisters. It now provides student accommodation for the London School of Economics.

Turn right into **Artillery Lane**, which runs up the side of the building, and keep walking ahead into the narrow **Artillery Passage**, where there are a number of independent bars and restaurants.

(And the reason for the names of Gun Street, Artillery Lane and Artillery Passage? This was the site of the Old Artillery Ground where Henry VIII's Honourable Artillery Company used to practice.)

When you reach the **King's Stores Inn**, turn left into **Sandy's Row**.

Continue straight ahead into **Middlesex Street**. If you look up to the top of the unusually shaped modern building on the right-hand side, you'll see a horse about to leap off the roof. Erected 100 feet above street level, it's a 'Figurative Public Sculpture' made of bronze. It is actually 16 feet high, around twice the size of a real horse. Sculpted by Judy Bolt, it was commissioned by the Standard Life Insurance Company and is on the roof of East India House, now a campus of Coventry University. (Interestingly, other buildings in the street are also university campuses, including those of Northumbria and Newcastle Universities.)

**Carry on ahead down Middlesex Street**, which is part of Tower Hamlets' boundary with the City of London. It is also the site of the famous **Petticoat Lane Market**, one of London's longest established markets, which after over 400 years is still very popular. Even though the market officially closes at 2pm it is often busy until quite late in the afternoon.

Petticoat Lane Market has been here for over 400 years and its unusual name came about because the Huguenot lace makers would sell the petticoats they made here. However, the prudish Victorians found mention of women's undergarments too embarrassing, and so in the middle of the 19th they changed it to Middlesex Street. However, these days most people call it by its original name.

The market has grown significantly over the years, and now occupies a number of adjoining streets, though it still only trades on Sunday mornings. However, it is often still busy even by

mid-late afternoon. There's another market in the nearby Wentworth Street, which opens Monday to Friday (closed Saturdays) and which on Sundays becomes part of one vast 'Petticoat Lane' market.

The market has always been known for selling clothes, mainly because of its proximity to the hundreds of small garment manufacturers and importers in this area, a result of the sewing and tailoring skills of the thousands of immigrants who over the years have settled around here.

In the past it's had something of a dubious reputation and was treated with suspicion by the authorities as it was never regulated – it was even regarded by some as possibly illegal. I have read that as late as the 1930s, police cars and fire engines with their bells ringing would be driven down Middlesex Street in a deliberate attempt to disrupt the market. However, an Act of Parliament eventually granted the market a legal status.

Indeed, there used to be a saying that the traders in Petticoat Lane would be "Likely to steal your petticoat and shortly afterwards sell it back to you", (or words to that effect) And as a child, I certainly remember my father going on a coach trip to the market, and proudly coming home with a present for my mother – a pair of special quality 'nylons' (as stockings were known back in the 50s). When she opened them, she discovered to her dismay – and my father's – that they had no feet! And in case you're wondering, this was years before 'footless legwear' had been thought of!

Finally, it was on a market stall in Petticoat Lane that Lord Alan Sugar, the founder of Amstrad Computers and star of 'The Apprentice' TV show, started his career.

Pass **Strype Street** and when you reach **Cobb Street** you will already see signs of the wholesale clothing shops for which this area has been renowned for many years.

We will turn to the right up **Harrow Place**, which runs up the side of the Middlesex Street Estate, an enormous Corporation of London apartment block.

However, if you would like to take a look at **Wentworth Street**, the site of the famous Wentworth Clothing Market that's open every day, then walk on for a few more yards – it's the next turning on the left. It's probably of particular interest to those interested in dressmaking and specialist materials as besides the market stalls there are shops on both sides whose windows and fascias advertise materials such as Swiss voile, Guinea brocade and voile, Holland wax, Jacquard cupion, organza damask, French and Swiss lace, Giuseppe lace, men's voile and cotton voile – few of which I've ever heard of!

As you walk up **Harrow Place** you get a rather unusual view of the Gherkin and, when you get to the top of Harrow Place, walk up the steps on the right-hand corner. After a few yards turn right through the rather grand gated entrance that leads into an unusual new development known as **Devonshire Square**, although as you will see there is more than just one square.

On the wall facing you is a clock – turn left here into the large square and continue on through the archway; this brings you out into a huge spectacular glass-roofed atrium where there are several bars and restaurants. Whilst most are closed on Sundays, this is a busy place during weekday lunch times and evenings as it is popular with people enjoying an after-work drink or meal before they catch their trains home.

Walk straight ahead through the arch that leads into **New Street**, and continue on along, passing several excellent restaurants on your left. Ahead you will already see the glass canopied frontage of **Liverpool Street station**, which is both a mainline rail station and a tube station.

### **Tube lines**

The entrance to the Underground is on the left-hand side, opposite platforms 4 and 5 – towards the rear (far end) of the mainline station. It is served by the Central, Hammersmith & City, Circle and Metropolitan Lines.

### **Buses**

Liverpool Street is on many bus routes – stops are on both sides of the street, and I suggest you need to consult the TFL bus app or a ‘bus route’ map to help.

And if you are using the station, a final piece of information – to the left of the station entrance is Hamilton Hall, a pub named after Lord Claud Hamilton, the Chairman of the Great Eastern Railway Company who built the original Liverpool Street station. The pub is in what was once the ballroom of the magnificent Great Eastern Hotel, which had been designed to impress its guests. The ballroom was three stories high, with soaring mirrors, marble fireplaces, enormous chandeliers and many paintings around the walls, and said to have been a copy of an apartment in the Hôtel de Soubise in Paris. The hotel closed when the Second World War broke out and it was many years before another hotel opened on the site. However, when Liverpool Street station was renovated, Wetherspoons took over the ballroom and turned it into the pub you see today. And as with most Wetherspoons conversions, many of the original features have been protected – they were actually found in a storeroom underneath and carefully restored.

## **APPENDIX TO THE EAST END SUNDAY MARKETS WALK**

### **THE ORIGINAL COLUMBIA MARKET**

The first Columbia Market opened in 1869 in an enormous and spectacular Gothic-style building, just a few hundred yards from where the existing street market is held today.

It was the idea of Angela Burdett-Coutts, a remarkable woman who was the granddaughter of Thomas Coutts, the founder of the famous Coutts Bank. When he died, she inherited his considerable fortune which she then used to help those less fortunate, eventually becoming known as the 'Queen of the Poor'. (I have put a little more about this amazing woman in a separate section.)

She felt strongly about the terrible living conditions of the poor who lived in the slums of London's Bethnal Green and, besides helping to provide land for social housing (we saw an example with the Leopold Buildings at the beginning of the walk), she was convinced they were being exploited by local traders who she believed were selling them poor quality and overpriced food. In an attempt to do something about this she paid for an enormous market building to be built.

Besides the covered market with four hundred stalls, there were also shops, flats for both the traders and other local people to live in, a church, swimming pool and baths and even a laundry. All quite remarkable for the East End at that time.

She planned for the market to be something that would rival Billingsgate which was situated just a couple of miles away in the City of London and at the time, the world's biggest fish market. To achieve this, she and her husband, who owned a large North Sea fishing fleet, planned to build a railway line that would deliver fresh fish on a daily basis directly to their new market.

However, she hadn't anticipated the obstacles. Firstly, and perhaps rather bizarrely, it seemed that local people still preferred to buy from the street traders or continue to go to the Billingsgate, Spitalfields or Covent Garden Markets. And of course those markets weren't going to give up their monopolies that easily, anyway. Perhaps even more surprising, the market traders who she was trying to help, didn't like the new buildings and preferred to continue selling their products outside in the open air as they had before. As a result the market closed just fifteen years later, and Angela handed the buildings over to the City of London for use as workshops and a workhouse.

Sadly, nothing now remains of this immensely grand building, as it was demolished in the late 1950s and new and rather nondescript houses and blocks of flats were built on the site.

### **ANGELA BURDETT-COUTTS**

Angela Burdett-Coutts was the granddaughter of Thomas Coutts, the founder of Coutts Bank, and she had inherited his considerable fortune. With it she then dedicated much of her life to helping those less fortunate.



The list of what she achieved was simply staggering. Besides all her philanthropic work in London's East End – for which she earned the 'title' of 'Queen of the Poor' – she funded the Church of England bishoprics in Cape Town, Adelaide and British Columbia. And it was for the latter that the road was named 'Columbia Road'.

She helped to start, or provided early funding for, many charities, including the RSPCA and NSPCC. Amongst her many other philanthropic deeds, too numerous to mention here, were the funding of major projects to help the poor of Palestine and the Holy Land – she even led an expedition to find clean drinking water in Jerusalem.

She worked with other amazing women such as Florence Nightingale and was a friend of Charles Dickens, with whom she founded a home for 'women who had turned to a life of immorality'.

Edward VII said of her, "After my mother, she's the most remarkable woman in the kingdom."

If you'd like to know more about her, I suggest you also take a look at the following Wikipedia page:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angela\\_Burdett-Coutts,\\_1st\\_Baroness\\_Burdett-Coutts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angela_Burdett-Coutts,_1st_Baroness_Burdett-Coutts)

## **COLUMBIA MARKET AND THE WORLD WAR II BOMBING RAID**

I found a fascinating article on the BBC's 'WW2 People's War' website. Written by Tom Betts on 7th September 2005, exactly sixty-five years on from Saturday September 7th, 1940, the start of the German Blitz on London, it tells the remarkable tale of someone who was in the Columbia Market air raid shelter when it suffered a direct hit from a 50kg bomb. It also gives some details of what life was like for a child in London's East End during the Second World War.

Tom's article begins:

"It was the day when my life was changed forever, although it was so very long ago, to me it is remembered as clearly as if it happened only last week.

"I can remember it not just because of what happened, but at the age of twelve and a half, as I was, I can clearly recall the comments, actions, faces of all those with me at the time. A day recorded in my memory that I will never forget.

"The Saturday was a very warm, cloudless day and just like any other early September day. We lived in Columbia Buildings, Bethnal Green. The 'Buildings' as they were known were a grand project built by Madam Burdett-Coutts, of the banking world, as a Victorian philanthropic venture in the 1860s. It was an enormous Gothic creation comprised of a covered market, accommodation for several hundred shops and storage for the traders. It had its own church, swimming pool and baths and the luxury of a laundry on the fifth floor. By no means the typical East End block of flats, far more majestic.

"On the day in question after my mother had cooked my brother and I breakfast, friends and I went out knocking on doors to take orders for coke from the local gas works. Our 'bit' for the war effort paid 3 pence a sack which enabled us to buy pie and eels (Dutchy Lees) and also the means to go to the Saturday cinema. In the afternoon the sirens began but having had some few light air raids in the previous nights, we were not too alarmed. Today though was different, there was much more anti-aircraft gun activity. We were more than curious and climbed up six floors to take a better look. There were hundreds of German airplanes, so low that the crosses on their wings were clear to see. The bombs began slowly dropping from them, landing on the docks. It

was bizarre, as I remember looking at the square below where children were still playing, completely oblivious to the destruction not too far away.”

To read the rest of Tom’s evocative story, visit this link:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/38/a8071238.shtml>

## THE OLD NICHOL

For anyone who may be interested in reading more about the Old Nichol and Boundary Estate, I have taken the following excellent account of the estate prior to its rebuilding from a book review that was published in the *Daily Mail* on 10 July 2008.

The book is called *The Blackest Streets; The Life and Death of a Victorian Slum*, which I can thoroughly recommend. It was written by Sarah Wise and published by The Bodley Head.

“Situated in Bethnal Green and part of Shoreditch, it was only 25 minutes’ walk from the Bank of England. But the Old Nichol, a maze of rotting streets hemmed in by bleak tenement buildings, might as well have been on a different planet. Most Londoners preferred to forget that it even existed.

“When Mowbray put on his boots and walked through the Old Nichol, he passed down narrow, muddy streets, skirting pools of filthy liquid and the carcasses of dogs and cats. Eyes watched him greedily through broken windowpanes. Mowbray would go on to decry the injustices of the age and was an impassioned socialist. And given his surroundings, it is hardly surprising that the slum’s most famous son spoke so loudly.

“No grass grew in this dark and putrid labyrinth. The narrow canyons of blackened brick tenements blocked out the sun and all colour was leached away except for the dull greys of smoke and soot.

“In a two-room tenement in Anne Court, just around the corner from where Mowbray lived, the meagre fire burning in the grate drew moisture out of the saturated plaster, creating wisps of fog inside the house. In the Old Nichol, there was no escape from the gloom. Its two tiny rooms were home to a married couple and six children, but there were no beds.

“When Montagu Williams, a magistrate and writer, asked how they slept, the mother replied: ‘Oh, we sleep how we can.’

“Through the hole in the wall which served as a door, Williams could see the woman’s haggard, hollow-cheeked husband and two teenage sons making uppers for boots.

“Many of these houses were below pavement level and so flooded when it rained. In cold weather – and warmth was a luxury in the Old Nichol – broken panes were blocked up with anything that came to hand: newspapers, rags, sometimes old hats. In winter, even the water jugs iced over. Mowbray lived with his wife and four children in a little room in Boundary Street, which marked the border between Bethnal Green and Shoreditch.

“Around the corner, in a single room, a missionary had recently discovered a single woman nursing a feverish young girl. On the floor lay the body of the woman’s six-year-old son, who had died a few hours earlier. Her husband, a singer of street ballads, had refused to return home because a public hanging at Tyburn had drawn the crowds and business was good.

“When he did get back to his dead child, he stormed out again at the sight of the missionary urging his wife to pray.”

It is hard to believe that such obscenities were allowed to persist in the richest city in the Empire. But, as this book reveals, they were commonplace in this corner of London. Sarah Wise's *The Blackest Streets* reveals that the Nichol's 30 or so streets housed around 5,700 people and had a death rate that was almost double that of neighbouring areas.

### **MORE ON THE OLD NICHOL AND THE BOUNDARY ESTATE**

In 1850 Henry Mayhew, a journalist, reformer and cofounder of the satirical magazine *Punch*, wrote an article for the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper that detailed how appalling the conditions in 'Old Nichol' actually were. It said, "Roads were unmade, often mere alleys, houses small and without foundations, subdivided and often around unpaved courts. An almost total lack of drainage and sewerage was made worse by the ponds formed by the excavation of brickearth. Pigs and cows in back yards, noxious trades like boiling tripe, melting tallow, or preparing cat's meat, and slaughterhouses, dust heaps, and 'lakes of putrefying night soil' added to the filth."

Around the same time, Charles Booth and a team of researchers had begun to visit every street in London in order to produce a map showing the levels of poverty and deprivation and its level of detail of was truly amazing. In his report on Arnold Circus Booth said that a quarter of all children living in the Old Nichol slums died before their first birthday.

On reading this report, the Reverend Jay, Vicar of the local Holy Trinity Church, took it up himself to spend more time visiting the area and helped raise money to build a church and a social club. He also encouraged Arthur Morrison, a journalist and author who wrote about life in the London's East End as well as popular detective stories, to pay a visit to the area. This resulted in a book about the life of a child living in the slum called *A Child of the Jago*. Another newspaper report of 1863 said, "The limits of a single article would be insufficient to give any detailed description of even a day's visit. There is nothing picturesque about such misery. It is but one painful and monotonous round of vice, filth and poverty, huddled in dark cellars, ruined garrets, bare and blackened rooms, reeking with disease and death, and without means, even if there were the inclination for the most ordinary observations of decency and cleanliness."

All of this eventually prompted the council to take action, and in 1884 they engaged Owen Fleming, a 23-year old architect, to draw up plans for a new 'council housing estate', which was called the Boundary Project. He came up with a plan to demolish around fifteen acres of slums and build in their place a rather aesthetic concept of several wide, tree-lined streets, named after places along the River Thames. These radiated off from a central circular street – the Arnold Circus we see today. Work started in 1884 on what was said to have been Britain's, and possibly even the world's, first 'council estate'.

Although the red brick houses and flats were well built, they were still basic by today's standards. There was no individual running water and just a shared toilet and bath on the landing of each floor. (Refurbishments have since put those things right, though!)

The highpoint was, and still is, the raised garden in the centre of Arnold Circus, built using the rubble from the demolished houses, and with a bandstand in its middle.

However, despite this seemingly good progress, there was controversy at the time. Although the new development could accommodate around the same number as had been living in the Old Nichol, the process of who should and shouldn't be offered a flat was sometimes rather arbitrary. Firstly, the rent was set at a level that few of the very poor could afford, and those who were thought to be of 'too low a class' were apparently sometimes refused. This meant they were then forced to move from here into other, equally crowded, slums in east London. Indeed,

apparently out of the 6,000 people who lost their homes in the slum clearance, only eleven (you read that right!) were able to move into the new flats. Instead, it was artisans, clerks and even a vicar who moved in.

The Boundary Project didn't just provide housing; two schools were built (you can see where one used to be on Arnold Circus), there were shops and workshops for the craftsmen, such as furniture and shoemakers.

In total 20 blocks of five-storey flats were erected in the seven roads that lead off from Arnold Circus. With their design inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement, they are now Grade II listed and, since the recent popularity of areas such as this with young 'millennials', prices of these flats have risen quite astronomically – I've seen them advertised at up to almost half a million pounds – and that's for a one bed flat!

However, around two-thirds of them are still owned by the local borough council. It's become a bit of a 'hot potato' as the council have been trying to pass the responsibility for the properties that they own on to a housing association, a plan that's been hugely opposed by the existing tenants.

And the name 'Arnold Circus'? It was named after Sir Arthur Arnold, who at that time was the Chairman of the London County Council. It is said that it was thanks to him that the actual construction of the buildings was of a sufficiently high standard that they are still in use today, as well as encouraging the estates thoughtful layout and design.

## **ST LEONARD'S SHOREDITCH**

The church is dedicated to St Leonard, who was born in France and became the patron saint of prisoners and the mentally ill, and it still plays a significant role today in helping the less fortunate, with particular emphasis on recovering addicts.

The first church we know about was built here by the Anglo-Saxons, which was later demolished by the Normans who built a new church on the site. The first record of a vicar being appointed was in 1185!

St Leonard's was known for many centuries as the Actors' Church. This was because the first theatre in England was close by in New Inn Yard, where several of Shakespeare's plays had their first performances. It is said that Shakespeare, who lived nearby, might have worshipped in this church, though not the one we see today; the church he would have known was already five hundred years old by that time. Indeed, it is reckoned by some historians that Shakespeare set the final tomb scene in Romeo and Juliet here.

A number of Shakespeare's contemporaries, including three of the Burbage family – James, who built the first English theatre; his son Cuthbert, who built the Globe Theatre and his other son Richard who was the first to play Macbeth, Hamlet, Richard III, Othello and Romeo, are buried in the church's crypt.

The Norman church eventually collapsed in the early 18th century. This was because of problems with the adjacent River Walbrook overflowing and damaging the foundations. A new church was erected on the site that was designed by George Dance the Elder, a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren, who had also designed the Lord Mayor's Mansion House in the City of London. His design was not universally popular at the time. A plain Tuscan portico is surmounted by a square clock-tower and belfry. These then support the gallery with its fluted

cupola. This is raised on Corinthian columns topped by a gallery reflective of the tower one. Above them rises the elegant obelisk.

These slender columns, subtle colonnades and bright, large windows were hard for people at the time to accept. Later the Victorians made further changes, sadly blocking up the ground floor windows, whilst further damage was caused to the church during the Second World War. By 1990, the building was becoming unstable and was forced to close for two years to enable substantial restoration work to take place. However, today it is regarded as being one of the most important ecclesiastical architectural structures in England.

Further repairs, paid for by the Heritage Lottery Fund, are currently taking place (2020) to the spire, tower, roof, etc.

And I will just add that the church's situation in the heart of London's East End, surrounded by people of different faiths, or none at all, who over the years have generally been some of the poorest in London, has meant that a significant part of the church's role has been to try and provide them with support. That is particularly the case today, and the church has in place a number of measures – outreach, drop in centres, an 18-bed residential hostel for recovering addicts ... it's a long list.

And three final points of interest ... Firstly, the church has some wonderful acoustics and is a popular place for musical performances and has been used by the BBC Symphony Orchestra amongst many others.

Secondly, those who were fans of the television series *Rev.*, which starred Tom Holland, might recognise St Leonard's as 'St Saviour in the Marshes'.

And finally, in case the name of a church in Shoreditch is ringing a bell (pun intended!) then it maybe as a result of the nursery rhyme many of us learnt in childhood ... with the particular line of course being ... "When I grow rich", say the bells of Shoreditch. (Oranges and Lemons ...).

## **THE LEATHER MERCHANTS OF BRICK LANE**

I found an interesting article about Brick Lane's leather merchants on the *Spitalfields Life* website and have included a brief extract here:

"Not so long ago, almost all the shops north of the railway bridge in Brick Lane sold leather jackets and bags manufactured locally, but now there are only a handful of these businesses left.

"The manufacture of leather garments is an age-old industry on this side of London, existing as part of the clothing and textile trade that was a major source of employment here for centuries. A hundred years ago, the industry was predominantly Jewish but when Asian people arrived in significant numbers in the last century they worked as machinists in a trade that they eventually took over and now, a generation later, they find themselves presiding over its slow demise ...

"All but one of the leather shops I visited owned their buildings, which proved to be the key factor in their survival when others that paid the escalating rents had gone. I was fascinated to find that most were run by skilled men, experienced leatherworkers who offer the facility to have clothes and bags made to order. It was even more remarkable to learn that for a modest price you can buy a good quality jacket which has been made by hand in a workshop on Brick Lane. There may be only a few left, but my discovery was that these leather shops still have plenty going for them – if people only knew."

For the full story and a couple of dozen photographs, visit:  
<https://spitalfieldslife.com/2012/10/13/the-leather-shops-of-brick-lane/>

For anyone interested in knowing more about this area of London, then I can thoroughly recommend this excellent website.

## **IMMIGRATION AND SPITALFIELDS**

### **The Huguenots**

The first recognised wave of immigrants to move here in any great numbers were the Huguenots, who came mainly from northern France, whence they were fleeing persecution from the Catholic majorities. Many settled in an area of Spitalfields through which we pass. They were often highly skilled, particularly in the craft of silk weaving and some became quite wealthy and built elegant four or five-storey Georgian townhouses. Many of these were designed with attic rooms that had particularly large windows so as to let in as much light as possible; light was vital for those who were weaving, and they needed as much of it as possible. It was a profitable business and some of the Huguenot weavers became quite wealthy. We see several streets that still contain these houses, which are now Grade I or II listed.

However, the prosperity of the silk weaving Huguenots didn't last, as in the latter part of the 19th century the government abolished the existing heavy duties on imported silk, making business much more difficult and many moved away to find work in other parts of London and the South east.

### **Irish immigration**

As the Huguenots moved away, the next wave of immigrants arrived, this time from Ireland. Many were linen weavers, forced to leave because of the decline of the linen industry in Ireland, and the potato famine, which caused such a devastating loss of life as a result of starvation. Many of the large houses the Huguenots had built were then sub-divided to provide cramped, but cheap accommodation for the Irish, most of whom arrived with nothing. Some rooms in the houses began to be used as workshops, where a fortunate few found work in the linen weaving trade, taking over from their previous use for silk weaving, though it was far less profitable. However, most found work in the construction industry, which was booming at that time, with docks, railways and many other major construction projects taking place in London at that time.

As the Irish began to make better lives for themselves, they too moved on to other areas of London, many to places such as Kilburn (apparently at one time it was even known as 'County Kilburn!').

### **Jewish immigration**

Around the same time as the Irish had begun to settle here, so did huge numbers of Jews. They were fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe, particularly the pogroms in Poland and Russia. The number of Jews continued to grow, so much so that at one time the area was said to have one of the largest Jewish communities in Europe.

Many worked in the textile industry and set up the small tailoring and clothes manufacturing businesses for which the area became so well-known. However, by the 1950s they began moving out of the area, settling in areas of North London such as Barnet and Finchley.

## **The Bengalis**

As the number of Jews began to diminish in the 1950s, so their places were taken by the Bengali's. Many were from the Sylhet region of what is now Bangladesh, and many found work in the Jewish tailoring and businesses that had remained in the area. Over time, many set up their own textile businesses, mostly small and family owned and run, many of which still thrive today, as we will see when we visit Petticoat Lane area at the end of the walk.

But they didn't all enter the 'rag trade', as it used to be called, and it wasn't long before some Bengalis began opening curry houses, for which much of Brick Lane is now famous, the area even becoming known as 'Banglatown'.

## **CHARLES BOOTH'S 'POVERTY MAP OF LONDON'**

In the walk I mention the survey that was undertaken by Charles Booth, whose aim was to map the streets of London and show the various levels of poverty that existed.

The information is now held in the library of the London School of Economics (LSE). There they have an archive containing Charles Booth's *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People in London* (1886–1903).

The archive comprises over 450 volumes of interviews, questionnaires, observations and statistical information. It documents the social and economic life of London, highlighting all of its contrasts, complexities and contradictions. It also goes "behind the scenes" of the Inquiry itself, showing how Booth and his research team developed new methodologies and techniques in what is now recognised as a key milestone in the development of social research techniques. The archive can be accessed in the library's Reading Room.