

Members Report: Unknown East End of London Walk – Tues 17th June

Meeting on a grey but warm morning outside Whitechapel Underground station, we were introduced to Harry Jackson, our Blue Badge Guide for the morning. Harry first reminded us that the East End has been the natural first home for waves of immigrants for many centuries and this is ingrained in its varied history. After crossing the Whitechapel Road, we were led fifty yards or so eastwards so we could look across at The Blind Beggar pub, famous in the 1960s for the shooting of George Cornell by Ronnie, one of the infamous Kray twins.

A quick detour down a side street led us to another piece of history; Sidney Street, where a young Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary at the time, oversaw the famous siege in 1911, when two Latvian revolutionaries held off more than two hundred police for more than seven hours, after killing three policemen when a robbery went wrong.

A short walk led us to the Royal London Hospital, where we learnt about Joseph Merrick, otherwise known as 'The Elephant Man', and Edith Cavell, a nurse shot as a spy by the Germans, during the First World War.

Round the corner into Fulbourne Street, where our guide informed us that this was the site of a social club, which in 1907 was hired for the 5th Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Club; delegates included Joseph Stalin, Leon Trotsky, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Maxim Gorky.

Back onto the Whitechapel Road, where we see Booth House, a Salvation Army hostel, built on the site of the original building where William Booth started that organisation. Further along is the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, Britain's oldest manufacturer still in existence (1570), famous for the casting of Big Ben and the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Worth a visit in itself?

Passing Fournier Street, home to the French Huguenot silk weavers in the early 18th century, we turn in to Brick Lane, where we disperse for lunch, and on the recommendation of Harry our guide, head for the Beigel Bakery for a hot salt beef with mustard and pickle. Delicious! Thanks must go to our Organiser Judy Dumbrell.

James O'Neil

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