

Exploring London – Archive File of Group Visits

Here is a record of our Exploring London visits from November 2017 through until October 2018. For most recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

2017

November



We stepped back into the past with a fascinating visit to the Museum of London's archaeological archive at **Mortimer Wheeler House** near Old Street. It is the largest archaeological archive in Europe with 11 kilometres of shelving housing approximately 100,000 cardboard boxes full of intriguing artefacts uncovered through excavations from across London. We took a look at the contents of some of the boxes and gained first-hand experience of repackaging and labelling finds from the old Fulham Pottery. And, after touring the corridors of the building on Eagle Wharf Road, we had a brief look at the reserve collection of pottery, glass and ceramics. It's all here: from prehistoric to more recent times, from Roman pots to Victorian toothbrushes (a second group visits on 30 November). Report by Mary Harris, photo of the group at

work by Isabel Dickson.

Several Explorers booked tickets to visit the newly opened Postal Museum and take the 'Mail Rail' ride. It proved a very interesting, if cramped, ride. The actual ride was a highlight but the exhibits on display and the clever audio-visuials made it a wider experience. Apart from the Mail Rail building on one side of Phoenix Place the ticket price also gets you into the Postal Museum on the other side of the road. You can easily spend a couple of hours just in this building. Again, clever exhibits and good audio-visuials in the Postal Museum made the collection very informative and brought back memories of days gone by. Well worth an independent visit if people missed this organised trip.



December



December 2017 and January 2018 Historic Pubs on Fleet Street— two groups of hardy Explorers completed 'historic pubs' walks in horrible weather. The first photo (on the left) taken by Jo Potter shows the group outside the Blackfriar in December.

Julia Rountree's photo (on the right) with her report shows the January group rewarding themselves in the Old Bank of England!



Julia writes: On a rainy January day we were taken on a fascinating walking tour of some historic Fleet Street pubs by the excellent Jill Finch, a City of London Guide. Highlights included the first pub we visited, The Blackfriar. This pub, built in 1875, has a spectacular art nouveau interior, and only survives now because of an outcry against its proposed demolition in the 1960s. The other seven pubs, some Grade II listed, had similar stories including several claiming regular patrons like Dickens, Twain, Pepys and journalists from the Punch magazine — in their case resulting in the renaming of a Gin Palace in the 1840s to the Punch Tavern, as it is known today. The final pub we visited, and had a drink at to mark the end of our tour, was the astonishing Old Bank of England which sits in the former Law Courts branch of the Bank of England. The internal architecture befits its grandeur with a very high ceiling. A great end to the walk, and all the pubs are well worth a return visit.

2018

January

Annual get-together and tea. Upwards of forty Explorers met for tea and discussions (and the traditional cake exchange!) on 5 January. Looking back over our record of past Explorations since spring 2014 was particularly satisfying and several exciting suggestions were made for visits in the year to come. Already on the programme were the Mithraeum, the Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising, Wapping Police Station & Museum and Three Mills – to which were added Two Temple Place (an annual tradition!), Spencer House, Crossness Pumping Station, Chatham Historic Dockyard with several more as Explorers contributed their researches. The popularity of our programme, and the size of the group, mean that speedy replies to booking invitations are essential now! The photo shows the group beginning to settle down for the meeting at the Walter Sickert Community Centre. Thanks again to Liz for another successful year for the Exploring London group!





The group made two visits, led by Roberta (January) and Liz (February), to the newly opened Temple of Mithras. Group member Rachel Summerson has given us this link to her blogsite [here](#) which has more photographs from the visit. The reconstruction of the third century A.D. Roman Temple of Mithras, 7 metres underneath the Bloomberg SPACE, in Walbrook, sits on the same footprint as the original temple and uses, as far as possible, the original stones and bricks. The visitor experiences an atmospheric invocation of what it

might have been like to attend a Mithraic ceremony. We know very little about what actually happened. The cult, which was secret and exclusively male, came originally from Persia and spread quickly to all parts of the Roman Empire, and was especially popular in the army. Mithras is always depicted wearing a Phrygian cap and he is about to sacrifice a bull. He seems to have been associated with the sun god, and he came to be regarded as a saviour who offers his followers rebirth into an immortal life.

The religion has been seen as having Christian elements and the invocation we saw and heard in the Mithraeum certainly had a 'Christian' tinge, with the priest invoking Mithras and the worshippers responding, to the accompaniment of horns and sistrums.



Upstairs, on the ground floor, there is a beautifully arranged display of over 600 of the 14,000 artefacts discovered during the various excavations, both the original one in 1952 and the recent excavations when Bloomberg re-excavated the site. On the other side of the room, a vibrant tapestry by Isabel Nolan called Another View from Nowhen, 19.45 meters long, offers the viewer her personal take on the 2000 years of history beneath our feet. I enjoyed the whole experience.

February's group also spent time in St Stephen Walbrook, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, which is opposite the Bloomberg SPACE and is where the Samaritans were first launched by the Revd Chad Varah – see photograph.

February

A group of 27 'London Explorers' visited the **Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising**, in Ladbroke Grove (cleverly avoiding the snow, some of the group are pictured in the Museum's shop!). It all started with a packet of Munchies in 1963, when Robert Opie (son of Iona and Peter — well-known for their work with children's songs, games and folklore) started his collection of advertising and packaging ephemera. His first Museum opened in Gloucester in 1984 and since 2015 the Museum has been located in its current premises, the former 'London Lighthouse'.



How have brands, packaging and advertising affected our lives and lifestyle over the last 200 years? This fascinating museum looks at the evidence in the shape of tins (like *Colman's Mustard*), bottles (*H.P. sauce*), confectionery (*Nestlé's Milky Bar*), etc., the games we play, like *Monopoly*; the magazines we read, from *Women's Weekly* to *Radio Times*; and the things we collect, like coronation mugs, or biscuit tins

celebrating the Festival of Britain.

A late 19th century Wills tobacco and cigarette advertisement displays two pretty harem inmates, one lying seductively on a Persian carpet, the other lazily smoking a cigarette. This was a period when well-brought up ladies didn't smoke — but Wills obviously believed that exotic ladies smoking in a harem would show off their brand's sophistication. And it worked. By the 1920s, smoking was pretty well ubiquitous for men, and women who smoked were seen as modern and liberated.

As the 20th century came in, so did more and more branding, like *Kiwi* boot polish and *Heinz* baked beans, and adverts were ever more assiduous in selling a lifestyle with the goods. A poster shows a clean child whose mother has washed him with *Sunlight* soap being cooed over by admiring older women. And the sudden plunge into things American after World War II is very noticeable: the merchandise for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Mickey Mouse* was everywhere.

I found this museum both fascinating and disturbing. For most of the 20th century, gender roles were noticeably differentiated: women knew their place and exclaimed over the whiteness Persil brought to their weekly wash; and real men smoked. There was much covert pressure to conform to what advertisers needed their customers to want — there probably still is. An interesting and thought-provoking visit. (Report by Rachel Summerson.)

March



A group of Explorers made the first of three visits (repeated on 22 March and 5 April) to the **River Police Museum at Wapping Police Station** and Molly Turner wrote the following report on the visit. Photographs show the interior of the Museum and the view across the Thames when the doors are opened up!

The Thames River Police Museum is located in what was once the carpenter's workshop at Wapping Police Station. On a very wet morning we were welcomed by the Curator, Robert Jeffries, himself a

retired police officer with many years' experience of policing the river. He gave a very interesting and entertaining talk about the origins of, and some of the major incidents in, the early history of the Thames Police, which goes back to the 18th Century, making it the first policing body ever to be set up.

The new force began operating on the 2 July 1798 in Wapping High Street, thirty years before the Metropolitan Police began. At that time importers, especially from the West Indies, were suffering losses of £500,000 annually, and the government was losing import dues, because cargoes were unloaded from ships on the river by gangs of "lumpers", who were not paid but helped themselves to goods to sell. Mr. John Harriott and Mr. Patrick Colquhoun convinced the West India Merchants to finance the first preventative policing of the Thames, and they became the first

Magistrates, holding trials in the same building.

The first six months were particularly difficult, as the river thieves were losing their good living: a riot took place outside the Office when some 2,000 men arrived intending to burn it to the ground. Mr Jeffries told us about the first officer to be killed in the line of duty, Gabriel Franks, who was shot in a riot and died later in hospital, the first recorded police death. We were also told about The Ratcliffe Highway Murders of December 1811 and the terrible loss of life when the Paddle Steamer Princess Alice sank on the evening of 3rd



September 1878. Then we looked around the Museum itself, where exhibits include

uniforms and documents, and a fine collection of the everyday “Hardware” of policing from handcuffs to cutlasses. The door at the rear of the room was opened so we could go out on to the river and look to our right to see the original building where the Magistrates tried the culprits.

I found this a very interesting visit, especially having read the historical novels of Patrick Easter, who was a police officer and served with the River Police for a time. Although works of fiction, they give an authentic picture of what life and crime were like in Wapping and how the River Police began. More information about the subject can be found at the website www.thamespolicemuseum.org.uk. As always many thanks to Liz for organising the visit.

Two Temple Place. Having entered the grand Elizabethan style mansion and found ourselves in rooms decorated in the style of the French Renaissance it felt, at first, somewhat surreal to hear the jolly strains of Dixieland Jazz, and to see the viewing public gently swaying or tapping their feet in time to the syncopated beat as they wandered round the exhibition. However, on reflection it wasn't so out of place. This mansion, Two Temple Place, was built only in 1895 for Lord Astor, and many of the elements of the building and decoration were created to symbolize the linking of America and Europe. An exhibition on the coming of the Jazz Age therefore seemed actually very appropriate in this building.



I love jazz, particularly Dixieland and the style of jazz which developed soon after that. In fact it was this kind of music which prompted me to take up the clarinet — though sadly I had never quite managed the soaring improvisations which we heard as we went around looking at the exhibits on the two floors of the building. It wasn't an extensive exhibition, but it was very interesting to see how jazz fitted in so well with the exciting new developments in technology, art, and changes in society. Pathé News footage in both main exhibition rooms showed jazz musicians hanging from biplanes, bands playing to elephants and giraffes in the zoo, dancing waiters in cafés, and the development of large dance halls like the Hammersmith Palais. In the magnificent Grand Hall, with its stained glass windows and hammer beam roof there were swathes of Art Deco furnishing fabrics and pottery in 'Jazz' style. And we read and saw how the West Indian influence brought jazz over and popularised it in England and Europe. It was a very enjoyable visit — short enough to leave us time for a good cup of coffee in their café too — a prerequisite of any Exploring London trip! Well worth popping in (it's free) if you're around the Embankment before it closes on 22nd April. For more detail have a look at Rachel's blog [here](#). (Report by Margaret & Lawrie Pattinson.)

April



The House Mill, Three Mills, Bromley-by-Bow.

Our group of 33 hardy Explorers gathered in what had been the entrance hall of the Miller's House, reconstructed after bomb damage during WW2 to form the café and shop for the 'House Mill', part of the Three Mills site. Over a very welcome hot drink we were introduced to our guides, volunteers Eleanor and Christine, and heard about the 500-year history of milling on this site and along the River Lea — see photo.

The House Mill property was originally owned by Cistercian monks, then passed on through various private owners including the Bisson family until the last owners, Nicholson Breweries, who kept it going until the

1940s. Over the years grain has been milled for flour and for distilling gin. At one point in its history gunpowder was also milled. The current Grade 1 listed building — the mill is the oldest tidal mill in Britain — dates from 1802. Standing outside we could also see the adjacent Clock Mill which was rebuilt in 1812 and now houses the East London Science School; all the properties stand on a man-made island formed by damming the river.

Inside the House Mill building we were taken over three of the four floors, where the milling process was explained in detail; we were able to see the surviving machinery on site, the water wheels, mill-stones, chutes and pulleys. We also learned about the working practices in the mill, including shift-work based on the tidal cycles. The uneven floors and partly-rotting timbers clearly indicated the challenges ahead for the trust and volunteers running the exciting project of keeping the House Mill open for visitors like us.

Thanks are due to Explorer Kate Wark for arranging the visit; and to House Mill trustee Beverley Charters, as well as volunteers Eleanor, Christine and Tony for making it so enjoyable — and for preparing an excellent lunch! There's a very good book *A Short History of Three Mills* by Brian Strong, which is obtainable from House Mill (www.housemill.org.uk) and there are more open days for visitors this year: do go along! Report & photo by Liz Simpson, draft by Natalie Teich.

Spencer House: on a chilly, wet and windy morning our group of 30 visited Spencer House at 27 St. James`s Place, London (although the photo shows Spencer House from Green Park in the sun, when Liz returned three days later). Braving the weather was worth it as, on arrival, we had a warm welcome from both our knowledgeable and entertaining guide Jenny Mitchell and the roaring fire in the grate of the reception room.

Built between 1756 and 1766 for the first Earl Spencer it is London`s only 18th century Town House to survive intact. Designed by John Vardy and James Stuart the State Rooms are amongst the first neo-classical interiors in Europe. From its conception the house was recognised as one of the most sumptuous private residences ever built in London and a building of unique importance in the history of architecture. The Spencer family lived there continuously until 1895 and again for a short while in the first quarter of the 20th century. The house was then let out as offices or clubs.

During the Blitz of WW2 the few remaining treasures, specially made furniture and fireplaces were stripped out and taken to the Spencer home, Althorp, for safekeeping. Today the house remains in the ownership of Charles Spencer, the current Earl. In 1986 the family company of Jacob Rothschild (4th Baron Rothschild) secured a 120 year lease on the property and, in a highly acclaimed restoration project, returned the state rooms and garden to their late 18th century appearance. All the principal rooms were painstakingly restored. Their missing original features, including chimneypieces, doors, skirting mouldings and architraves were carefully copied from the originals which had been moved to Althorp during the Blitz and gradually incorporated there over the years. Paintings, sculptures and furniture have been bought to furnish and enhance the State Rooms. Other works of art have been borrowed from various sources including the Royal Collection, the Royal Academy, the Tate Gallery and Temple Newsam House, as well as private owners and dealers.



The eight State Rooms open to the public are a delight and enhanced by the views over the gardens to Green Park. No photography is allowed inside the house so go to www.spencerhouse.co.uk to have a look. Report by Pauline Pitt.

May



Markfield Beam Engine: this visit was led by Anne Wilkinson — thanks Anne. You can see Gilbert Vieri's full visit report [here](#).

Another really interesting and unusual visit.

A group of London Explorers headed to south London to find the **Cinema Museum**, hidden away off Kennington Lane (the visit is repeated on 23rd May). The Museum's core is the private collection of enthusiasts Ronald Grant and Martin Humphries, and since 1998 has been housed in the 'Master's House', the administrative hub of the former Lambeth Workhouse. Our visit started in the small, ground-floor 'cinema' with a lengthy, but lively, introduction to the history of cinema and the collection, the establishment of the workhouse in Lambeth and the links with Charlie Chaplin, which the founders and volunteer guides are keen to emphasise. Chaplin was briefly resident in the workhouse as a child, when his mother was admitted, and drew much of the inspiration for his films from his early life in Lambeth.



Outside the building (where our group photo was taken, with our entertaining guide for the day in his commissioner's uniform) we saw the remaining buildings of the complex, while inside the rooms and corridors were packed with projectors, display boards, staff uniforms, art deco seating and other artefacts associated with the cinema. There are hundreds of books, an estimated 1 million photos and 17 million feet of film in the archives. Upstairs, in what was the workhouse's chapel where regular film screenings now take place, we enjoyed reviving teas and coffees as the group listened to the last of our guide's stories; the full visit ended with a programme of five short films in the downstairs cinema. The Museum is currently under threat from development and any support is welcomed — go to www.cinemamuseum.org.uk for more information about this fascinating collection and building.

June



Walthamstow Wetlands, easily accessible by public transport from Islington and Hackney. We all met up in the Engine House, built in 1894, which has been converted into a visitors' centre and café and after our organiser's initial worries that we might not have enough guides (!), we were divided into two small groups and set off to explore the site. Our walk routes took us round the reservoirs, which still contribute to the supply of London's water.

The first reservoirs were low level but as the population of London increased during the Victorian period with the subsequent

increasing demand for clean water, the later reservoirs were high level and around 15 feet deep. The development of the site since 2012 has included additional planting to encourage wildlife and while parts of the site are accessible to walkers, joggers, fishermen and 'twitchers', some areas are still restricted to maintain conditions which have encouraged both resident and migratory birds. We passed the 'Copper Mill', an interesting industrial building which had milled both flour and gunpowder, using water power, and had also been adapted to hammer out sheets of copper which were then transported down to the Thames-side ship yards to 'copper-bottom' ships built there.

This combination of London's industrial history with a 211-hectare wildlife reserve makes the Walthamstow Wetlands an 'exploration' well-worth repeating — our photo shows one of the groups heading off to explore the site, led by our expert volunteer guide. Thanks to Liz Dare for making the initial arrangements for this visit and adding it to our programme.

Chatham on the Medway. We spent a glorious summer day in the 'Historic Dockyard', which was, for more than 400 years until the 1980s, an important centre for building and repairing Britain's warships. The site includes over 100 buildings and structures, including 47 'Ancient Monuments' and one visit hardly does it justice. Luckily, the entry ticket is valid for a year, allowing return visits (and you can get in for free with an Art Card!).

For many of us, the highlight of the visit was the spectacular Ropery or 'rope-walk', where we had a guided tour and watched rope being made. The quarter-mile-long 18th century building is still a commercial factory, supplying ropes of varying sizes and raw materials. Other buildings are set out to display the range of crafts needed to build and maintain the ships in Chatham and to show the history of the town and the Navy.

Three historic ships are in dry-dock: HMS Gannet, a sloop launched in 1878; HMS Cavalier (1944), a CA-class destroyer; and the submarine HMS Ocelot, the last warship built for the Royal Navy at Chatham and launched in 1962. All three can be visited, and some intrepid Explorers made it on to the Ocelot (I didn't!). Keen-eyed explorers could spot where sequences of 'Les Miserables' were filmed ... and where the dockyard has featured as Poplar in TV's 'Call the Midwife'!

For more information, there's a very detailed Wikipedia article on Chatham Dockyard, and an excellent book by Philip MacDougall — *Chatham Dockyard: The Rise and Fall of a Military Industrial Complex*.



July



In this month we had two interesting walks, the first around **Hoxton and Haggerston**, the second around **Hackney**. A full report of both with photographs can be seen [here](#).

August

Strawberry Hill, where Horace Walpole's house is still delighting visitors. Our tour was led by two knowledgeable guides and the report [here](#) is by Anne Wilkinson, with photos by Pauline Frost, Sue Lamble (who originally suggested and researched the visit) and Gilbert Vieri — the portrait is Walpole himself!



September



For the first of September's visits, 'Explorers' headed to the **Museum of London Docklands** again. This year the focus was the temporary, free, exhibition 'Roman dead: death and burial in Roman London' which had been prompted by the unique discovery of a complete Roman stone sarcophagus in Southwark last year. Rachel's blog [here](#) tells more about the exhibition and there's also more information [here](#). Several group members took the opportunity to visit other parts of the Museum and some of us came back by boat, cruising along the Thames in the September sun!

The second of **September's** visits was to Kenwood House in Hampstead and 'Explorer' Sue Lamble, who volunteers there, led the group tour. Her report [here](#) is a personal take on the morning's visit — and everyone did enjoy it very much, especially as we had another fine Autumn day to see the House and Heath at its best.



October



A group of 34 Explorers visited the Charterhouse site in Clerkenwell in **October**. We split into two smaller groups for a 'Brother's Tour'; Rachel's blog [here](#) is from the group led by Brother Mansel (in the red jacket!); Molly's report with photos shows Brother Brian with his group [here](#). There are regular tours if you didn't manage to come with us — click [here](#) — and there's a very pleasant café and shop too!

See next file for November 2018 onwards.