



Exploring London – Archive File of Group Visits

Here is a record of our Exploring London visits from October 2023 through until September 2024. For most recent visits and future plans, go to our [web page](#)

2023

October

East London walk: 'Exploring London' walk in East London, led by City of London guide Jill Finch to complement her 'Wapping Walk' held earlier this year. The photo shows the group waiting at Aldgate East station, ready to head off. The walk will be repeated — if there's enough demand — on 14 November.



'On a cold sunny morning we left Aldgate East to walk to Shadwell, following a route that focused on places of historical and social interest and the changing use of some buildings into flats, pubs and offices. The first highlight was the Eastern Dispensary, on Lemn Street, originally founded in 1782 by a group of City doctors, the present building from 1858-9, offered medical and surgical treatment for the poor, with evening surgeries

and midwives on site! We then passed St George's German Lutheran Church, now closed although their small vestry serves as an office for the Historic Chapels Trust. En route to Commercial Street we went passed Goodman's Field, (Canters Way) originally a rural community used for stabling, now a new housing development. On the corner of Commercial Road, with its architectural diversity of old and new buildings, stands the Gunmakers Proof House, owned by the Worshipful Company of Gun Makers and still licensed by the government today to test new handguns in London, along with all imported guns. We turned into Henriques Street where we noted that the Tommy Flowers Centre, previously a school, is named for the man who helped build the decoding machine 'Colossus' at Bletchley Park. Opposite is the Bernhard Baron House, originally a Jewish Community Centre providing different health, education and social activities for the local Jewish community, now closed and converted into flats. From here we passed the Potter and Clarke warehouse, a company which were wholesale suppliers of herbs and Brown and Eagle, a wool storage company with its original warehouse cranes in situ. We then came to Wiltons Music Hall with its chequered history: an eighteenth ale house, then music hall, Methodist Mission soup kitchen, survived being demolished and now a vibrant Music Hall again. From here we went through Wellclose Square and gardens, previously a Scandinavia Quarter in Shadwell, we briefly heard about the Ratcliffe Highway Murders before going to see a Hawksmoor Church, St George in the East, badly damaged in World War II, then a new church was rebuilt within the ruins. To complete the walk we went round the church into St George's Gardens, passing the old

Victorian mortuary which is now on English Heritage's 'At Risk Register'. To the left of the Park is a secondary school where E R Braithwaite, was a teacher in the post-war years and wrote about his experiences in 'To Sir with Love', later filmed starring Sidney Poitier. The walk ended by the Cable Street Mural, created to commemorate the Battle of Cable Street in 1936. A fascinating walk full of facts, interesting stories and so many diverse cultures, communities and architectural gems. (Report by Judith B)

'Treasures of Gold and Silver Wire' at the Guildhall Art Gallery: It's safe to say that the Worshipful Company of Gold and Silver Wyre Drawers is not amongst the most well-known of the City of London's one hundred or so historic and modern livery companies, though since the Coronation we are more familiar with the product, the gold and silver wire and thread used to



embellish religious and secular clothing, artefacts and precious jewellery and embroidery. The Company is marking 400 years since James I gave it its first Royal Charter in 1623 with an exhibition at the Guildhall Art Gallery and Explorers enjoyed a specially arranged visit on 26 October, with a tour led by the curator of the exhibition Dr Karen Watts. Karen introduced us to the history of the livery company and the technology of making the wire or thread

(scarcely changed since medieval times) in the first of the three galleries. Taking us through into the second gallery there were examples of royal regalia and other civic ceremonial outfits, ecclesiastical vestments, military uniforms and stage costumes. Within a relatively small space, there were varied themes to be followed through and individual items that caught one's eye: the Bacton Altar cloth fashioned from a dress owned by Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Mary's Coronation Dress from 1911 (with its hidden pocket), the suit designed for Charles Dickens's only attendance at court and Darcy Bussell's tutu — going behind the display case one could spot several rows of hooks and eyes where it had been adjusted for



different dancers! Then the final room was a showcase of contemporary jewellery and embroidery created by young artists and craftspeople, demonstrating that age-old skills are still being carried on and virtuoso pieces created. Karen was available to talk individually to Explorers as we moved around the exhibition at our own pace and as part of our visit we were each given a copy of 'Treasures of Gold and Silver Wire', published to accompany the exhibition. One Explorer said she had 'run out of Wow's' as she moved from one display to the next — a perfect way of summing up an unexpectedly interesting and impressive exhibition.

November

London Metropolitan Archives: The building housing the London Metropolitan Archives behind the old Finsbury Town Hall isn't that easy to find, even if you're locals like us, but 17 Explorers met there on 3 November for a visit organised by archives officer Jack Deeprise and colleagues. Our visit had been postponed from October so there would have been more Explorers in the group — but here they are waiting to start the visit.



Jack introduced the LMA and the range of archive materials it includes with a short video presentation, which also showed how materials could be researched online — though the website is not that intuitive! Moving into the public areas, the group saw the reference sections — freely available to enquirers during opening hours — and where holders of 'History cards' can work with original materials they have requested. Jack then took the group behind the scenes and into the parts of the LMA that visitors don't usually see, miles of climate-controlled storage and the conservation studios where books and documents are repaired and conserved. Then it was back upstairs where a wealth of original documents, photos and other archived materials had been set out for Explorers to examine. They ranged from a collection of photos and drawings of old Islington to Charles Booth's 'poverty maps', and maps showing bomb damage from the Second World War. Ecclesiastical records were also included: a volume from St Paul's Cathedral with entries from the 1200s. And as a complete contrast, the LMA also houses records from companies originally based in London — there were packaging designs and adverts for Hornimans teas!

In their feedback to the visit, several Explorers said they'd be returning to the LMA for their own researches, 'exploring' another part of London that had been unfamiliar. With this positive feedback in mind, enquiries have already been made about a second visit in spring 2024 which will — hopefully — be convenient for Explorers who had to drop out of this visit because of the change of date. Further information about the LMA is on www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma



East End walk: Jill Finch's walks are extremely popular with Explorers, so there was a second group waiting to head off from Aldgate East with Jill for a repeat of the walk she had successfully led in October. Pictured by the Black Sheep Coffee stand outside the station, the group were ready to follow the route as planned, ending at Shadwell Station. But a downpour started shortly after leaving and although several members gamely plodded on, Jill decided it was just too horrible to keep going. She said later that in all the years she has been taking group walks, it was only the second walk she'd stopped before the final destination!

Jill kindly offered to repeat the walk in better weather — and she shared some

other suggestions for 2024 walks for us — watch this space!

December

Guildhall in the City of London: Our visit was first planned for October, but in an attempt to be helpful as the Guildhall was apparently overwhelmed with visitors, we postponed our booking to December, which meant a last-minute change of City guides and only restricted access to parts of the building.



As Liz S was in York, Explorers Pauline and Brenda looked after the group, who met up on a chilly December morning at St Lawrence Jewry church. Inside the Guildhall itself, the visit was largely restricted to the impressive Great Hall but Christine the guide had a wealth of history at her fingertips and plenty of anecdotes to share! The medieval Guildhall (built 1411-1440) survived until major damage during the Great Fire of London in 1666; the Great Hall was the scene of civic functions and state trials, including that of Lady Jane Grey in 1553. The post-Fire building was added to and embellished — the current main entrance was designed by George Dance in 1788 — but on 29 December 1940 the roof was again destroyed in the Blitz and the today's roof and ceiling are the work of Giles Gilbert Scott, completed in 1953. Our photograph shows the Hall, flanked by impressive monuments and overlooked by statues of the legendary guardians of the City, the giants Gog and Magog.

Our guide Christine added a visit to St Lawrence Jewry church to the programme. The medieval church was another victim of the 1666 Great Fire, rebuilt to the plans of Sir Christopher Wren, and then badly damaged in 1940, like much of the surrounding area. Recently reopened after major works, the interior is looking at its best as befits the official church of the City and the Lord Mayor of London!

2024

January



It's 5 January, the day before Twelfth Night, and Exploring London members get together to share drinks and treats and talk about the plans for the 2024 programme. The four events already scheduled were discussed (they are up on the webpage) and there were plenty of suggestions for other venues to visit and walks to follow — including Japan House in Kensington, a return visit to London Metropolitan Archives for members who

couldn't join in the popular visit in 2023, the Lloyds building in the City of London, a walk with Jill Finch focussing on John Donne and a 'ghost signs' walk in Fitzrovia. Offers to research and plan extra events were gratefully received by Liz, the group coordinator! Our photo shows Jean explaining how one can access amazing views over the City of London from two new

skyscrapers in Bishopsgate. Since this meeting, Exploring London's seaside day trip has been booked — Broadstairs on Friday 28 June so there's plenty to look forward to in 2024.

February



Trinity House: We may be heading back there later in the summer for a guided walk so look out for details soon! In the meantime, Tim M has written this report:

Trinity House could be considered one of the most important headquarters in London for our island nation

since even today over 90% of our imports come by sea. Henry VIII set up the Corporation in 1514 to care for the safety and supervision of our coasts, though not Scotland. Queen Elizabeth I gave the Brethren of the Corporation the right to build lighthouses and other navigation guides. The first lighthouse was built in 1609. In the grand entrance hall of Trinity House there are several beautiful models of lighthouses, and also of the later invention, lightships. Surprisingly the ships had no engines and so the last of them was swamped in a storm twenty years ago with several crew members drowned. But we saw on the models that they did have cannons, not to attack others, but to make a noise warning in fog.



The building has a stylish 18th century frontage in a grand City position directly opposite the Tower of London. Sadly it was bombed during the Blitz, so the interior is a rather bland reproduction. There is a fine stairwell to the grand second floor reception rooms. It has some huge pictures of the gathered Brethren of the Corporation in the style of a City livery company, who our guide Kate said were elected by each other mainly for the purpose of networking. Further research tells me that many have more useful skills, enough to advise on coastal security, or as expert witnesses into sea disasters. The main use of the building now is as administration base for a very important organisation that ensures our coasts are safe and straightforward to navigate; that all British sailors are properly trained; and that certain very busy waterways, such as the English Channel and the Thames are well-regulated.

Two Temple Place: On yet another wet day in London Explorers made their way to Two Temple Place (built for William Waldorf Astor and completed in 1895) for what is becoming an annual tradition — visiting to see the current year's exhibition. In partnership with the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, the Stained Glass Museum in Ely and Stourbridge Glass Museum this year's exhibition *The Glass Heart: art, industry and collaboration* aimed to show visitors key moments in English glass making history and contemporary artworks using the medium. On the ground floor there were displays of traditional stained glass from medieval examples to the Victorian era, etched glass, delicate 'ships in bottles' and examples of the manufactured glassware found in most kitchens. Who knew that I had a design classic in my Pyrex casserole and lid! Upstairs the displays featured modern artworks, including a large construction *Judge and Jury* from 2023. Quite by chance, the artist Chris Day was at Two Temple Place that afternoon and was happy to talk to visitors about his creation made from frames of microbore copper pipe and blown glass — and our photo shows him chatting to visitors!



This exhibition will be running until 21 April, with a programme of linked events, and is well-worth a visit (as is the building itself)

www.twotempleplace.org

March



The Linnean Society: Luckily for us, the rain held off on Wednesday so we could take a group photograph of Explorers outside the Linnean Society's building in Burlington House! Founded in 1788 by Sir James Smith, the Linnean Society is 'the oldest active society devoted to natural history', taking its name from Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus, whose collections and library the Society has housed since 1829. It has admitted woman as Fellows since 1904/1905! The current building was purpose built for the Society in 1873, when it joined the other 'learned societies' grouped around Burlington House. Incidentally we were delighted to hear that their presence at Burlington House has now been secured (March 2024) with a 999 year lease following an agreement with the government.

After an introduction to the history and current activities of the Society in the Meeting Room, overlooked by portraits of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, our group was divided into two smaller groups for our tours. Climbing the stairs up to the Library our guide explained the significance of the displays including Linnaeus' own specimen cabinet, and there was time for a quick look at the current temporary exhibition *Lovely as a tree*. Downstairs, in the secure vault, books which formed Linnaeus' own library were shelved and cabinets housed specimens of plants, fish, insects ... in their original packaging as Linnaeus stored them. The first edition of Linnaeus' classification

system of natural history included 'mythical' creatures such as the griffin and phoenix as we could see in the example we were shown. By the 10th edition in three volumes, homo sapiens was included as mammal — and there were no more unicorns to be seen!

More about the Society can be found on its informative website www.linnean.org. Much of their holdings has been digitised and the building is well worth a visit as there are monthly 'treasures tours'. Thanks are due to our excellent guides for the visit, Isabelle and Andrea, and to fellow-Explorer Judith B who set up this visit for us.

Japan House: Pauline F set up a visit for Explorers to Japan House on Kensington High Street — it was so popular it was oversubscribed so we may have to persuade Pauline to arrange another visit some time! Judith B wrote an insightful report on the visit, which follows: Japan House is situated in High Street Kensington: when you enter it is into a world of calm and amazing gifts (you go through the Gift Shop and small coffee bar), the noise of the outside world disappears. Our guide from Japan House provided an excellent insight into Ainu culture, as it exists today and how it is now celebrating its history through younger members of this community. The Ainu are an indigenous people who have for centuries inhabited northern Japan, especially Hokkaido and the surrounding islands. Their distinct culture stems from their frequent trade contacts with people from different areas and in 1869 they were adopted by the Japanese government. This resulted in some of their traditions being discouraged and lost. However, more recently it has become a government policy to sustain and value the Ainu culture and heritage, hence the exhibition.



Through video interviews and displays of contemporary Ainu works, the exhibition explored different themes, including how the critically endangered language, originally only spoken, is being preserved in written form and how the area's environment is preserved by using the traditional methods to grow and harvest food, with an emphasis on local plants occupying a central part of their cooking and being used for medicinal purposes. The traditional method of building homes or cise, built from locally sourced trees using specially designed tools, was also shown through film — no bricks, JCBs or cement in sight!

Our guide also talked about two key Ainu crafts which were on display: exquisite hand worn textiles are made from tree bark and woven on looms while Ainu wood carving is a deeply rooted tradition and is now reemerging in Nibutani, where the art of carving wooden plates or trays is flourishing again. Today the craftspeople express their creativity by devising new patterns for more modern items including cutting boards, pot rests and shoe horns, all of which were for sale in the shop.

April



Wellcome Collection: Exploring London has visited the Wellcome Collection on a couple of occasions in the past, to tour its permanent displays and see temporary exhibitions there. On 16 April we managed to fit in a visit before the current show 'The Cult of Beauty' finished its run at the end of the month. The building on Euston Road, opposite the mainline station, is an impressive space to visit, with library, shop and an excellent cafe — as can be seen from the photo of Explorers enjoying a cup of coffee and a chat before visiting the exhibition! It's open every day, and offers — free — an impressive programme of events as well as exhibitions 'exploring health and human experience'. Check it out on

www.wellcomecollection.org.

The exhibition 'The Cult of Beauty' offered, as the notes accompanying it stated, 'an invitation to widen and complicate our understanding of beauty beyond the binaries of beautiful or ugly, natural or artificial, physical or digital'. As a visitor, one explored the main themes: 'The ideals of beauty', 'The industry of beauty' and 'Subverting beauty' to discover art works, historical objects, pharmaceuticals and surgical procedures, the industrial mass-marketing of beauty and finally how ideas of what is beautiful are being challenged by contemporary artists. As one Explorer summed up her visit to this interesting exhibition: 'Lots of talking points ... for example we were reminiscing about how we couldn't wait to wear makeup and what we wore, now how times have changed ... '.

May

Fitzrovia: What better weather could we have had on 8 May to 'explore' Fitzrovia, with London guide Jane Parker? The photo shows Explorers, with the 'Fitzrovia Mural' in the background (corner of Tottenham Court Road and Tottenham Street, opposite Heal's) ready to set off in the sun! Judith B writes: 'what a perfect day for a walk to explore the quiet streets of Fitzrovia and understand its history through its many historical buildings, different trades and health connections. This area of Camden has in the past been home to manufacturers of pianos and furniture, sold in the shops along Tottenham Court Road, with furniture still prominent today — Heal's has been trading on this site since 1833. The American Church, facing Heal's, was rebuilt in the 1950s after a bomb devastated the area in June 1944 and behind it on the corner of Whitfield Street and Chitty Street there's an amazing Art Deco building, with its metal window frames and fluted panels, which was the headquarters of Marsham Tyres, (1932-1937). We then strolled in the warm sunshine to hear about plans for the redevelopment of the BT Tower and the telephone exchanges'. As the group walk continued, Jean W was intrigued by 'individual sheets of music fluttering over our heads under the covered walkway' at the Wellcome building.



Judith continues: 'Fitzrovia had many connections to health and in Foley Street we looked at the facade of a Victorian workhouse, which started life as an asylum in the 1750s, became part of the Middlesex Hospital complex and is now being repurposed into luxurious flats. Opposite the flats was the King and Queen Pub, where Bob Dylan played an impromptu gig in the 1960s. We passed a previous nurses' home, (now John Astor House for key workers) in Foley Street, where there is a plaque to Sister Louise Thomas GC, a nursing sister awarded the George Cross for her brave actions following an explosion at the Middlesex Hospital on 26th January 1934. We then went to see Langham Court Hotel, (Langham Street, Grade 2 listed building) built in 1901 as a nursing home, before becoming a private clinic in the 1960s, and then undergoing a complete refurbishment in the 1990s to become a hotel.

For Jean 'the highlight was to come when we ended our walk on the former site of the Middlesex Hospital. It was the amazing chapel that used to be within the hospital itself, where patients and staff could go for solace, peace and prayers. It has had a £2 million restoration and refurbishment which has been beautifully done, with bright colours picked out in gold. The chapel is breathtakingly beautiful and absolutely worth a visit, free and open on Wednesdays'. Judith continued that 'a few of us then walked with Jane to see some 'ghost signs' in Marylebone Passage, for Sign and Ticket Printers, Pring & Rose. A really informative 1½ hours, thanks to Jane.' But thanks are also due to Judith herself who made the initial arrangements for this walk — thank you Judith!



Trinity House: On 24 May, twenty four Explorers met up outside Trinity House for a walking tour titled 'Sailors, saints and Samuel Pepys', which had been suggested as a follow-up to the visit we made earlier this year to Trinity House itself. We divided into two smaller groups and headed off for our 'explorations' after a brief introduction to the history of Trinity House. Sailors, saints and Samuel Pepys indeed figured prominently in our walks. The photo shows the group led by David at our first stop, the monuments to the merchant navy

personnel who lost their lives during the first and second World Wars and the Falkland conflict. From there it was just a few steps to the execution site on Tower Hill with its list of victims from 1381 to 1747 — including Thomas Cromwell, familiar from Hilary Mantel's novels, James Duke of Monmouth (one of Charles II's illegitimate children) and Lord Lovat, the last person to be executed on Tower Hill, after the Jacobite rebellion.

Although the walk did not cover long distances, it served to remind us all how much there is to learn about our city on our 'explorations'. Behind the impressive building, formerly the Port of London Authority and now a hotel, we found a newly created garden (look for Pepys Street on a map) where there are references, on stone plaques set into the pathways, to Samuel Pepys and his life and career — even the parmesan cheese he buried in his garden for safety during the Great Fire in 1666! Then it was on to the quiet

churchyard of St Olave's, Hart Street, where both Samuel and Elizabeth Pepys were buried — the church is open for visiting Tuesday to Thursday. Modern office developments overshadowed the remains of All Hallows Staining, and Minster Court with its three statues of horses referencing St Marks in Venice dates from the late 1980s. But I think we all agreed with our guide that the garden which was designed around the picturesque ruins of St Dunstan in the East was an absolute delight and a haven of calm for City workers.

And then it was back on the busy Byward Street, passing the old Custom House building and we were at All Hallows by the Tower Church, reputed to be the oldest church in the City, dating from 675CE. Pepys — again — and his friend William Penn climbed its tower to view the devastation of the 1660 fire. It's full of maritime references and a brief visit to the museum in the crypt was not enough — I'm sure several of us will be back! An almost circular walking tour ended with an opportunity for some of us to walk over to see how the wild flower planting in the Tower of London moat is looking, three years after SuperBloom. It's looking great at the moment — what a pity one now has to pay the full entrance price for the Tower to walk through it!

June

July

August

September

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October

See next file for October 2024 onwards.