

Cultural
Walks
1 & 2 !

Exploring the vanishing Jewish East End





Introduction

*By Steven Berkoff,
still resident in the East End*

The East End, as I knew it from the brief time I spent there after the war, was a place of constant activity. In the summer, my street mates and I would go swimming by Tower Bridge; tons of sand had been placed on the shore and it became the Cockney's Riviera. After a vigorous swim, it would be

a treat to go to the Lyon's teashop in Aldgate and avail ourselves of the goodies to be had there, tomato soup with mashed potatoes being the favourite.

Naturally Sunday morning in the 'Lane' was a must and a place to haggle with stamp collectors, since I was an avid philatelist in those days. Weeknights were spent at the Oxford and St. George's Boys Club in Berner Street, where I acquired high skills in 'ping pong', the working man's tennis. Rainy days were spent in Betts Street Baths where my enthusiasm to swim up and down endlessly was rewarded with a 'mile' certificate. I can remember to this day the Bath Manager giving me half a crown from his meagre wages to crown my efforts. Mum and I would frequently go to the Palaseum Picture House at the top of our street to watch the double bill, taking with us a pile of sandwiches and a bottle of Tizer to get us through the three-hour programme. Hebrew classes at the large synagogue in Brick Lane were less memorable, but endurable if afterwards I was to pick up some fish and chips from the shop opposite Aunty Betty's in Cannon Street Road. Next door to us in 25 Anthony Street lived a young girl called Sadie who mysteriously used to dress up like an adult and wear makeup on certain evenings. I then learnt that she was playing the Grand Palais, the one remaining theatre at that time performing plays in Yiddish.

Uncle Henry's barber shop was around the corner and once was enough for me since his clippers used to really pinch and had me in tears. Mum took me to the 'Poplar' cinema after finishing school at Raines in Arbour Square. I disliked the school intensely since corporal punishment was meted out for trivial offences like being unusually active or whispering in class, so I was very glad to leave. As I grew older I would hang out with all the other Jewish youth at Johnny Issac's Fish and Chip Shop which was the Sunday night 'hang out'. 'The Waste', as it was called, along Whitechapel, was another place

of adventure and I worked there for a while for a man who called himself the 'Pen King'. I worked for him occasional Saturdays and I believe it was here that I first got my taste for acting. Eventually our family was re-housed to a council flat in Manor House, N4. But for years I would take the No. 653 bus back to the East End. I somehow found it hard to get away.

© Steven Berkoff 2003

Walk 1

Aldgate to Whitechapel Library

Artists, Cigarmakers and Markets



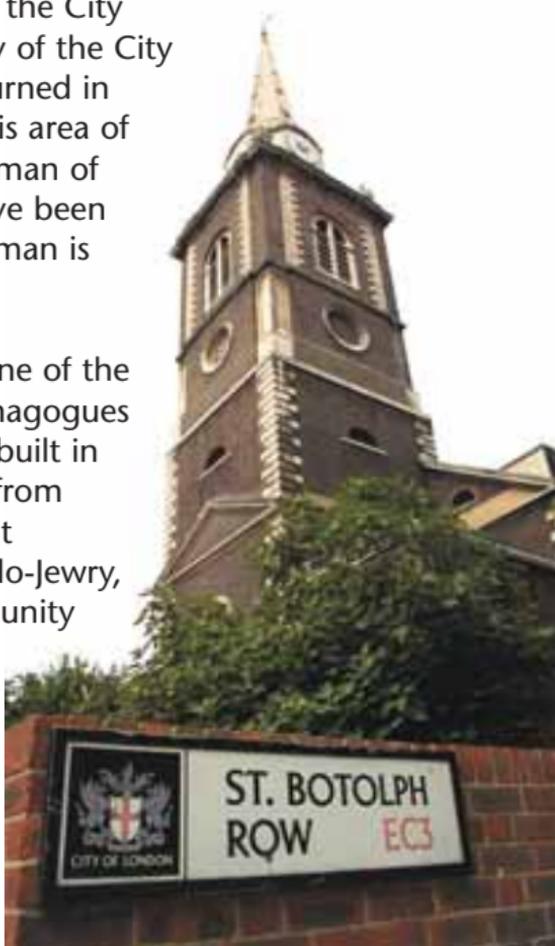
Starting point St. Botolph's, Aldgate

Finishing point Whitechapel Library

Estimate time 2.25 hours

The walk commences outside the church of **(1) St. Botolph's, Aldgate** in the ward of Portsoken in the City of London, a ward that is regarded very much as being part of the Jewish East End. Portsoken has had a centuries old association with the Jewish community. Portsoken is that part of the City which fell outside the City walls but within the authority of the City itself. Ever since the Jews returned in 1656, they have settled in this area of the City. Almost all the Alderman of the ward since the 1840s have been Jewish and the present Alderman is Michael Bear.

Situated within the ward is one of the oldest and most beautiful synagogues in England. Bevis Marks was built in 1701 by the Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal. The great Cathedral Synagogue of Anglo-Jewry, built by the Ashkenazi community in the 18th century, the Dukes Place Synagogue was also close by. Other famous institutions of the Jewish community were also in this ward such as



the Jewish Chronicle. Founded in 1841, it is the oldest Jewish weekly English language journal in the world. St. Botolph's, the 18th century church, has had close links with the Jewish community. The bells were donated in 1961 by the then Lord Mayor, Sir Bernard Waley-Cohen. Outside the church is a drinking fountain erected on the church railings to honour the memory of Frederick Mocatta, the 19th century Jewish philanthropist who helped Jews and non-Jews alike.

Walk eastwards along Aldgate High Street into the subway and emerge at the Middlesex Street exit. Middlesex Street is better known by its former name Petticoat Lane, the name of the famous market which still exists, but which used to be almost entirely Jewish. As now, it used to sell almost every product imaginable including clothing and food and the traders were known for their colourful banter. Walk up Middlesex Street and turn right into Cobb Street walking towards Bell Lane. At Leyden Street look right and you will see dilapidated public toilets where the Jewish traders used to meet to put the world to rights. The toilets were known as the **(2) Parliament of Petticoat Lane**. When you get to Bell Lane turn left then go on until you reach Brune Street where you turn right. Walk a few yards until you see an attractive building on your left with a terracotta façade, the former **(3) Jewish soup kitchen for the Poor**. Designed by the well-known Jewish architect Lewis Solomon in 1902, it was one of the many soup kitchens founded by wealthy West End Jews to alleviate poverty among the poor Jews in the area. It is now an expensive apartment block. Retrace your footsteps to Bell Lane and look up to your right at a rather modern office block (39 Bell Lane), the site of the greatest Jewish educational



establishment in the East End. **(4) The Jews Free School** was founded in the 19th century. At one stage it was regarded as the largest school in the world and its former pupils include Bud Flanagan, the diamond millionaire, Barney Barnato and Joe Loss the great bandleader. It was bombed in the Second World War when it closed and moved to Camden.

Courtesy of London Metropolitan Archive



Walk north up Bell Lane and take the first left into Stewards Lane and continue along Artillery Passage. Turn right up Sandy's Row and stop outside the synagogue, which is on the right hand side. **(5) The Sandy's Row Synagogue** is one of the four synagogues still active in the East End

(There used to be 150.) This former Huguenot chapel was converted into a synagogue in 1870 for the Jews of Dutch descent. The Dutch Jews controlled the cigar and diamond cutting industries in London at that time.



Walk up Sandy's Row, cross over to Fort Street, heading north along the paved footpath past Spitalfields Market, with a glass office block on your left. Spitalfields used to employ a large number of Jewish workers. Go up to Folgate Street and turn right and then left into Elder Street.

At **(6) Number 32 Elder Street** you will see a blue plaque to Mark Gertler, arguably the most famous artist to have emerged from the ghetto. If you look at the coal hole cover on the pavement beneath the blue plaque, you will see a representation from his most famous painting "The Merry Go Round", a powerful indictment of war. He committed suicide in 1939.



Retrace your steps to Folgate Street and turn left towards Commercial Street. Turn right onto Commercial Street and then left into Hanbury Street. On your right at **(7) Number 12 Hanbury Street** is a blue plaque to Bud Flanagan (born Reuben Weintrop), a member of the Crazy Gang, whose most



did you know?

Before the Second World War there were over 150 synagogues in the East End and now there are only four, all of which are at risk.

famous song was 'Underneath the Arches'. Go along Hanbury Street and then turn right at Wilkes Street and then left into Princelet Street. At **(8) Number 6 Princelet Street** you will see a coal hole cover with a viola on it, marking the spot of the first purpose-built Yiddish theatre in London – The Hebrew Dramatic Club. It was founded in 1886 by David Smith, a kosher butcher, but in 1887, 17 people died when someone wrongly shouted, "fire" and the audience stampeded for the exit. It closed shortly afterwards.

At 19 Princelet Street you will see the former **(9) Princelet Street Synagogue**, which closed down in the 1970s. The front of the building is a former Huguenot house built in 1722, but at the rear is a synagogue, built in 1862. The building has become world famous as the setting of the book, *Rodinsky's Room*, by Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair.

Go towards Brick Lane and then turn right. As you walk down this busy thoroughfare look to your

left at the last Jewish business in Brick Lane, **(10) Katz**, which used to sell nothing but string. On your right on the corner of Brick Lane and Fournier Street you will see the **(11) Brick Lane Mosque**. This building is symbolic of the various immigrant groups who have settled in the area. It was built in the 18th century by the Huguenots and occupied for a while by the Methodists. It became a synagogue in the 19th century and closed in the 1950s to become a mosque. Almost over the road in Brick Lane is the site of the former steam baths, the Schewik, that was much used by the Jewish community. The interior is the subject of a famous painting by David Bomberg called *The Mud Bath*. Bomberg was another great painter to have emerged from the ghetto.

Go south down Brick Lane and turn right into **(12) Fashion Street**. Israel Zangwill mentions the street in the opening of the book *Children of the Ghetto*. The famous playwright Arnold Wesker also lived in the street and his semi-autobiographical play *Chicken Soup with Barley* is set there. Walk to end of Fashion Street and notice how a once shabby street is being gentrified.

At Commercial Street turn left and walk on a while. Over the road at **(13) Number 44-45 Commercial Street** is a building, which was the Jewish and East End Model Lodgings, which used to house 30 families. **(14) Number 43a Commercial Street** is the building which used to house the Jews Free School's infant section attended by Arnold Wesker.

Go down Commercial Street until you come to **(15) Toynbee Hall** on your left. This institution was founded in 1883 by local vicar Canon Samuel Barnett and his formidable wife Dame Henrietta Barnett. They encouraged Oxbridge graduates to settle in the area and work with the poor at Toynbee Hall. Toynbee Hall was a great centre for the Jewish population where they obtained legal advice and English lessons. The facility is now available for Bangladeshis living in the area.

Go north through the complex and emerge at Wentworth Street where you turn right. Immediately on your left you will see the **(16) Rothschild Archway** with the words '4% Dwellings Company' written on it. This arch is all that remains of the Rothschild Building built to alleviate the housing shortage among poor Jews. The Rothschild family formed the company and wealthy Jewish investors were guaranteed a 4% return on their money, hence the name.

Walk along Wentworth Street and turn right into Gunthorpe Street and along to Whitechapel High





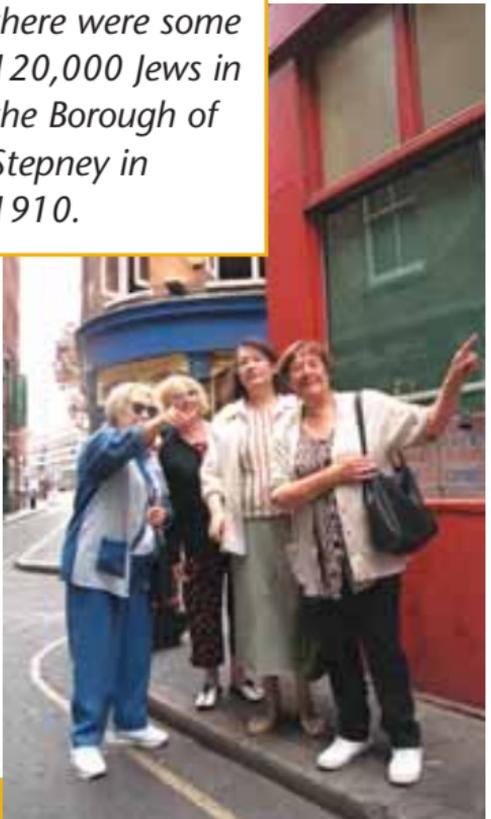
Street. As you go under the arch look left above the shop **(17) Albert's** and you will see an emblem containing the Star of David. This is the emblem of the now defunct Jewish Daily News. The emblem is by Arthur Szyk in the Arts and Crafts Style.

Proceed eastwards along Whitechapel High Street to view the last two buildings on our walk. **(18) The Whitechapel Art Gallery and Whitechapel Library.** Both were founded at the behest of Canon Barnett and his wife Henrietta Barnett, who felt it was important

that Jewish immigrants should also have access to cultural centres. The gallery designed by Charles Harrison Townsend in the Arts and Crafts Style held exhibitions by Jewish artists from the East End such as Bomberg, Gertler and Kramer. The blank space above the entrance was supposed to contain a mural "The Sphere of Message and Art" by the Victorian artist Walter Crane, but the finances were not forthcoming. The library was used by the Jewish community to escape the poverty and overcrowding of their tenements and became known as the 'University of the Ghetto'. Among the famous persons who used the library on a regular basis were the poet and artist Isaac Rosenberg (his blue plaque is on the building), the writer Jacob Bronowski and the playwrights Arnold Wesker and Bernard Kops. The building designed by Potts Sons and Hemmings in the Arts and Crafts style, has now closed as a library and has been sold to the Art Gallery.

did you know?

Historians estimate that there were some 120,000 Jews in the Borough of Stepney in 1910.



Aldgate East to Stepney Green

Rabbis, Radicals and the Yiddish Theatre



Starting point Aldgate East Station

Finishing point Stepney Green Station

Estimate time 2.5 hours

This walk commences at the corner of Whitechapel High Street and Commercial Street next to Aldgate East tube station (on the north side of the street). Look across to the rather dreary building in brown brick belonging to Lloyds TSB. On this site until the 1960s stood a beautiful department store called **(1) Gardiners, the 'Harrods of the East'**. On 4 October 1936 this site was involved in one of the most important political events in the history of the Jewish East End - the Battle of Cable Street. The leader of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley had planned to invade the East End with his blackshirts to intimidate the Jews. Mosley was stopped at Royal Mint Street by the police and the Battle of Cable Street actually took place between the anti-fascist demonstrators (mainly Jewish) and the police.

Walk eastwards down Whitechapel High Street and just before the Kentucky Fried Chicken go up a dirty little alley called Angel Alley. At the end of the alley is a book shop called the **(2) Freedom Book Shop**, which stocks a great deal of left wing and anarchist literature reflecting the political history of the area. On the wall of the alley is a mural containing the portraits of prominent anarchists. The most important for the purposes of our walk are Prince Peter Kropotkin and Rudolf Rocker.

Go back to the High Street and head eastwards along Whitechapel Road past



Courtesy of Whitechapel Methodist Mission



Whitechapel Art Gallery and Whitechapel Library (discussed in walk 1). Stop opposite a green space (Altab Ali Park) and look across to a modern brick building in Adler Street. The building previously on this site, for a brief period, housed the **(3) Jewish National Theatre**, which put on plays in Yiddish, virtually the lingua franca of the area for many years. The most famous play in Yiddish performed at this theatre was Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* starring the legend of the Yiddish Theatre Meier Tzelniker as Shylock.

Proceeding along the north side of Whitechapel Road, stop at the modern building housing Habibsons Bank. This was, until relatively recently, the site of Black Lion Yard the so-called **(4) 'Hatton Garden of the East End'**, because it contained some 18 jewellery shops. Women who bought their engagement rings there probably had their wedding photographs taken at the shop over the road (number 14 – the Victorian building with the Art Deco frontage) where the legendary photographer Boris Bennet (trading as 'Boris') specialised in wedding photographs of an extremely high standard.

Go on a few yards, cross the road at the traffic lights and turn right into Fieldgate Street. Follow this street round to the left until you come to the **(5) Fieldgate Street Synagogue**, one of the few active synagogues left in the area. It is now dwarfed by one of the largest mosques in Britain and will shortly be almost totally surrounded by the Islamic Centre, which is now being constructed. It is a typical small "stiebel" built in 1899 and rebuilt after bombing in the Second World War. To the left of the Synagogue, notice a plaque on the wall commemorating the founding of the Jewish bakery Grodzinskis in 1888.

Go on for about 200 yards and you will see a decaying former doss house called **(6) Tower House or Rowton House** now an expensive block of flats. In 1907 Joseph Stalin and Maxim Maximovitch Litvinov (a Jew who was subsequently to become Stalin's Commissar of Foreign Affairs) lived in this doss house paying sixpence a night, whilst attending the 5th conference

of the Russian Social Labour Democratic Party. It has also been a temporary home to numerous other impoverished anarchists who came to London.





Anna Tzelniker

The sole surviving Yiddish actress who starred in many of the great Yiddish productions.

Photographed here as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* in 1946, she said,

“There used to be four great Yiddish theatres in the Aldgate area of the East End, The Pavilion,

Feinmans, The Jewish National Theatre and the Grand Palais, the last one surviving until 1961. Jewish immigrants needed the Yiddish theatre for their souls, just as they needed bread to eat. Many of the plots were melodramatic, but the poor immigrants saw the plays as an escape from their drab surroundings. Once the immigrants became proficient in English, the Yiddish Theatre began to die.”



Walk until you get to New Road and turn left and walk till you get to the traffic lights on Whitechapel Road. Look across to the bill boards to the right of the Andrew Sketchley Theatre and you will see the site of the most famous of all the Yiddish Theatres

(7) The Pavilion, which closed in 1936 and was demolished in the 1960s. It had been a great Victorian theatre doing melodramas and pantomime but in 1906 it became an exclusively Yiddish theatre.



Walk eastwards along Whitechapel Road until you get to the **(8) Royal London Hospital**. This institution was founded in 1750 and has always had close links with the Jewish community. The Sophia, Talbot and Raphael wards catered for Orthodox Jews and kosher food was provided. The hospital also received substantial support from wealthy Jewish businessmen including the Rothschilds, Samuel Lewis, Basil Henriques and Samuel Montagu. Over the road from the hospital you will see a monument to Edward VII erected in his honour (in 1911) by the Jewish community of the area. It is by the famous sculptor W.S. Frith and is crowned by a winged angel. It contains a medallion portrait of the King.

Continue walking along Whitechapel Road and turn right into Sidney Street, keeping to your right. Stop at the gates, opposite Elrich Cottages, next to an ugly brown building and look up the street to a block of flats with blue balconies. On this site there stood at **(9) Number 100 Sidney Street** a house in a terrace (which has long disappeared) which was the scene of the most notorious siege in London's history. In January 1911, two Jewish immigrant anarchists, who were wanted for several murders, were discovered hiding in this house. The police arrived but realised they could not deal with such desperadoes. Troops were summoned from the Tower of London and eventually the house caught fire and the bodies of two anarchists were found inside. One of the great myths of the East End arose here as it was suspected that Peter Piatkov, (also known as Peter the Painter, a famous anarchist) had been in the house but had escaped. Nothing has ever been proved. Several films have been made about the siege including two by Alfred Hitchcock. The irrepresible Home Secretary of the time, Winston Churchill, insisted on being present throughout the siege.

Turn left into Lindley Street and walk as far as Jubilee Street. On the south west corner of the junction of the two streets there used to stand the **(10) Workers' Friends Club and Institute** founded in 1906 by a non-Jewish German immigrant, Rudolph Rocker. He learned Yiddish, organised the Jewish workers into unions and staged the 1912 Tailors' Strike, which led





to improved working conditions for workers in the notorious sweatshops.

Turn left into Jubilee Street and go through O'Leary Square. Stop at **(11) Rinkoffs** for a beigel or a slice of delicious cheesecake at the last traditional Jewish baker left in the East End. Go on through O'Leary Square and onto Mile End Road. The green space on the other side of the road known as **(12) 'The Waste'** is where many political demonstrations took place. Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism, addressed a meeting there in 1898 and during the Tailors' Strike in 1912 the tailors met there. In 1916 the so-called Schneiders Battalion (composed of Jewish tailors) was formed there.

did you know?

There is only one Jewish bakery left in the East End. Rinkoffs in O'Leary Square.

Go east along Mile End Road passing the Genesis Cinema on your left. At one stage this was known as the **(13) Paragon Theatre of Varieties** and among the people who performed there was the young Charlie Chaplin (he billed himself as the 'Hebrew' comic) and the young Barnet Winogradsky (later Lord Delfont). Keep walking and turn right into Stepney Green. You will come to a Victorian block of flats called **(14) Dunstan Dwellings** where Rudolph Rocker lived at no.33 in what was virtually an anarchist commune.

Go on and come to the **(15) Leonard Montefiore Drinking Fountain** next to a clock tower. This dilapidated fountain was erected in the 19th century in memory of Leonard Montefiore, whose family was one of the great philanthropic families in the East End. Go on and cross at the next zebra crossing. Turn left immediately and walk for about

50 yards until you come to some small black railings on your right. Turn right into the grassed area and walk up to the black gates at the rear. This is the former **(16) East London Synagogue**, built in the 1870s, but converted into flats fairly recently. Designed by the Jewish architect Barrow Emmanuel, it was the only synagogue in the East End planned as a great Cathedral Synagogue. It had a beautiful Byzantine interior, and magnificent furniture, most of which has disappeared. Retrace your steps. Turn right at the black railings and follow the narrow road to the right of the small park ahead of you along Stepney Green. Go past Stepney Green Court (formerly Stepney Dwellings) one of the so-called Rothschilds 4% dwellings. The Rothschilds raised the money from wealthy Jewish businessmen, and guaranteed them a 4% return on their money. Famous former residents of this block included Bernard Kops (author of *The Hamlet of Stepney Green*) and Lord Delfont.

Continue on past the **(17) Stepney Green Jewish School**, which has now moved to Ilford. Step back and admire the cartouche with the name of the school inscribed in the pediment of the building. Continue on past the Rosalind Green Hall, which used to be the **(18) Orthodox**

Synagogue on the Green. Walk past the site of the Stepney Green Jewish Hospital where there is now a modern block of flats.

Finally, pause outside one of the most beautiful houses in the East End **(19) Number 37 Stepney Green**. From about 1870 until 1913 it was a home for elderly Jews, but now restored as a family home.

Finish the walk by continuing on down Stepney Green and turning right onto Mile End Road towards Stepney Green Station.

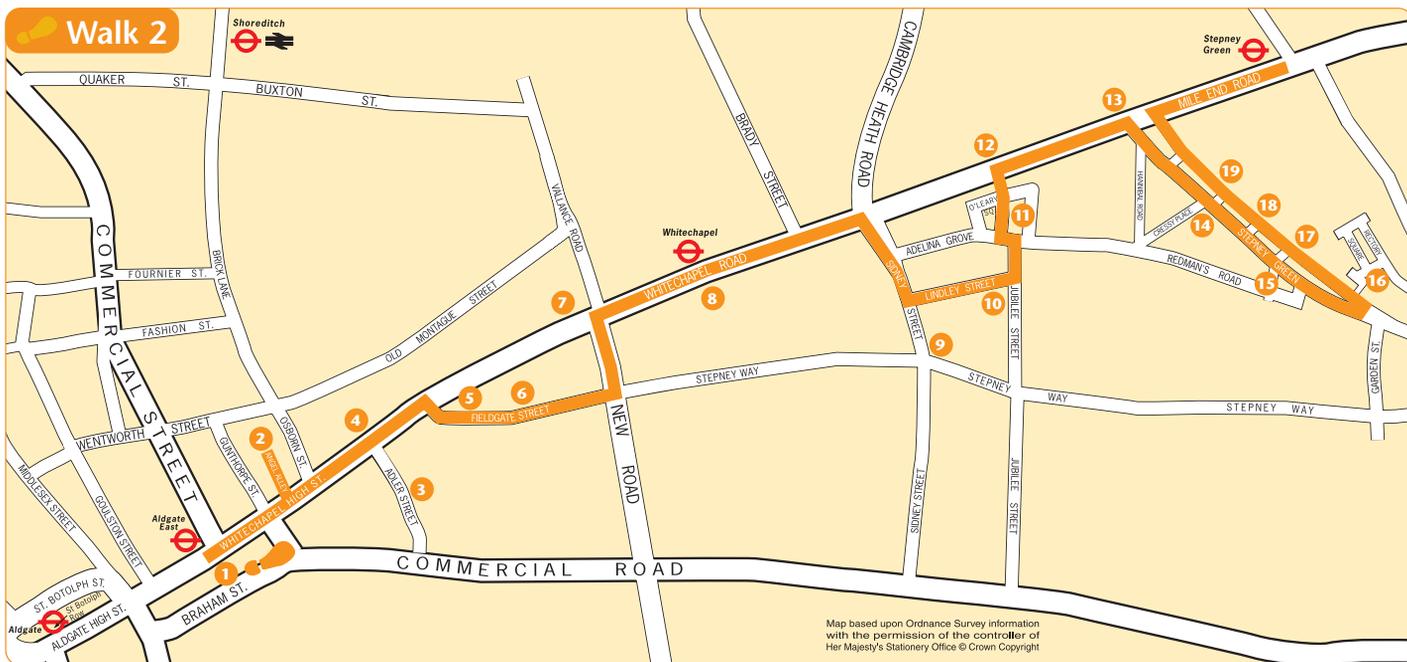
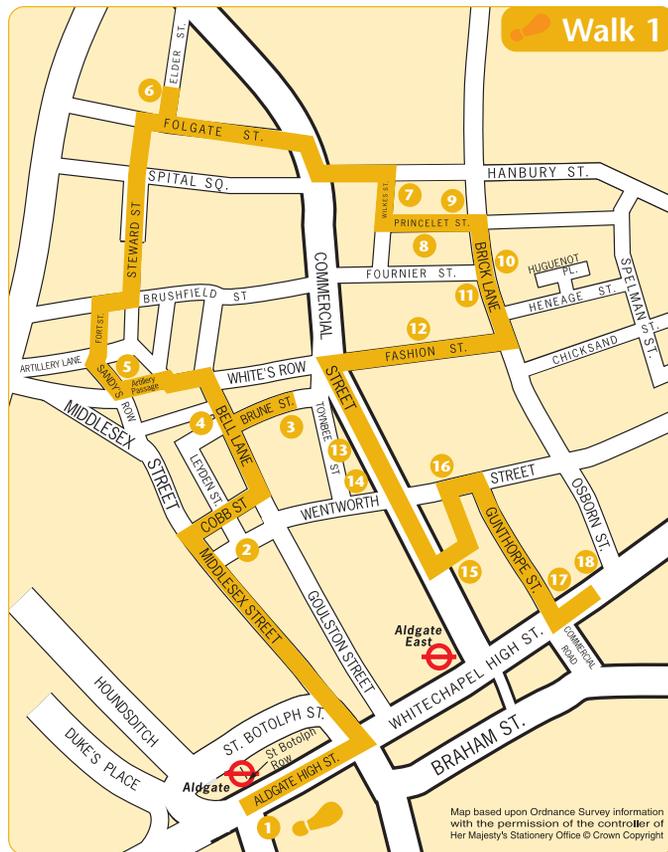


Walk 1 Aldgate to Whitechapel Library

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 St. Botolph's, Aldgate | 10 Katz |
| 2 Parliament of Petticoat Lane | 11 Brick Lane Mosque |
| 3 Jewish soup kitchen for the Poor | 12 Fashion Street |
| 4 The Jews Free School | 13 44-45 Commercial Street |
| 5 The Sandy's Row Synagogue | 14 43a Commercial Street |
| 6 32 Elder Street | 15 Toynbee Hall |
| 7 12 Hanbury Street | 16 Rothschild Archway |
| 8 6 Princelet Street | 17 Alberts |
| 9 Princelet Street Synagogue | 18 The Whitechapel Art Gallery and the Whitechapel Library |

Walk 2 Aldgate East to Stepney Green

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Gardeners | 11 Rinkoffs |
| 2 Freedom Book Shop | 12 The 'Waste' |
| 3 Jewish National Theatre | 13 Paragon Theatre of Varieties |
| 4 'Hatton Garden of the East End' | 14 Dunstan Dwellings |
| 5 Fieldgate Street Synagogue | 15 Leonard Montefiore Drinking Fountain |
| 6 Tower House | 16 East London Synagogue |
| 7 The Pavilion | 17 Stepney Green Jewish School |
| 8 Royal London Hospital | 18 Orthodox Synagogue |
| 9 100 Sidney Street | 19 37 Stepney Green |
| 10 Workers Friends Club and Institute | |





Timeline

- 1066** Arrival of King William I ('the Conqueror') with his 'personal' Jews from Rouen.
- 1190** Massacre of Jews in York
- 1290** Expulsion of the Jews from England by King Edward I.
- 1656** Return of the Jews to England after negotiations between Oliver Cromwell and Menasseh Ben Israel.
- 1753** Passing of the Jewish Naturalization Bill.
- 1855** Sir David Salomons becomes first Jewish Lord Mayor of London.
- 1858** Baron Lionel de Rothschild becomes the first practising Jew to take his seat in the House of Commons.
- 1868** Benjamin Disraeli becomes first Jewish-born Prime Minister of England.
- 1881** Assassination of Tzar Alexander II of Russia leads to programs against Jews in Eastern Europe.
- 1905/6** Russo-Japanese War results in a large migration of East European Jews to the West.
- 1907** Aliens Act seeking to restrict the number of Jews entering England.
- 1936** Battle of Cable Street. Sir Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists attempt to invade the Jewish East End.
- 1939-1945** Destruction of a great deal of the East End results in a large number of Jews in the East End leaving for Essex and North London.

Further information

The Author

This booklet was compiled by Clive Bettington a lawyer and tour guide. In March 2003 Clive founded the Jewish East End Celebration Society (JEECS) in order to save the fast disappearing heritage of the Jewish East End. JEECS works to preserve the remaining Jewish buildings of the Jewish East End and encourage the academic study of all aspects of the history of the area. If you want to know more about JEECS, please email Clive at c.bettington@jeecs.org.uk or visit www.jeeecs.org.uk

To find out more

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain

33 Seymour Place, London W1H 5AU

Tel: 020 7724 4232

London's Jewish Museum will re-open in 2009 in Camden. For details of events and exhibitions about Jewish history and culture, visit www.jewishmuseum.org.uk

For more information on things to do in Tower Hamlets visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/data/discover

While every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this guide, Tower Hamlets Council cannot accept responsibility for any errors, omissions or subsequent alterations.

Design by Tower Design 020 7364 4274 | 10895 2/08

East End Synagogues

The four remaining active synagogues in the East End:

Congregation of Jacob Synagogue (1903 – Kehillas Ya'akov)

351-353 Commercial Road
London E1 2PS

Tel: 020 7790 2874

East London Central Synagogue (1922)

30-40 Nelson Street
London E1 2DE

Tel: 020 7790 9809

Fieldgate Street Great Synagogue (1899)

Fieldgate Street
London E1 1JU

Tel: 020 72472644

Sandy's Row Synagogue (1766)

4a Sandy's Row
London E1 7HW

Tel: 020 7253 8311



A large print version of this leaflet is available by contacting 020 7364 4958 or visiting www.towerhamlets.gov.uk