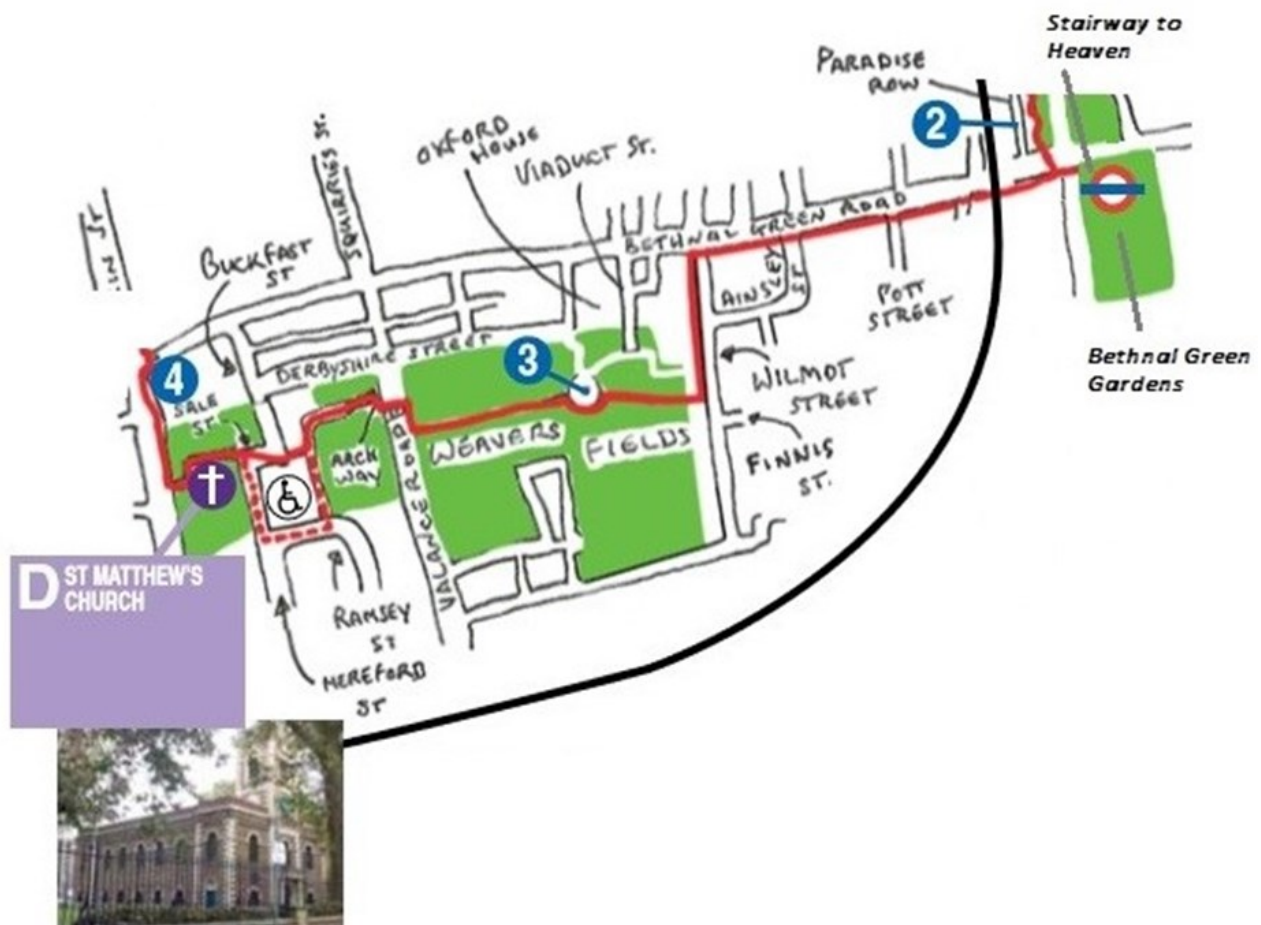


UNLOCK

STAY AT HOME LONDON WALK 2020

Stage 1— Lives shattered by conflict

Bethnal Green Underground Station to St Matthew's Church



The 2020 Walk in Tower Hamlets is postponed until **24th April 2021**. Please bring your 2020 map and support us then. For 2020 we are providing this 'armchair' version of the walk, in seven sections. We hope that you will enjoy it and then donate to Unlock just as you would have done if you have been out walking the London Streets for us this year, if not more so! See page 5 for details. Unlock needs the funding that you provide more than ever. When the COVID 19 emergency is over the poorest communities will have been hit the hardest and those are the places where Unlock's work will be needed more than ever! We are relying on you to make that possible.

Unlocking Real life stories of urban people
Revealing Good News of the down to earth Christ
Releasing life changing skills and confidence

WALK THIS WAY



As we leave Bethnal Green tube station take a moment to reflect on what happened in this place on the 3rd March 1943.

The station was part of the eastern extension of the Central Line, which had been left unfinished at the start of the war (they had not yet laid the rail lines). Bethnal Green Local Authority had requisitioned the station as a bomb shelter and, at 8:27 in the evening, the sirens had begun and local people, along with three bus-loads of others, began to enter the unlit stairwell from the blacked-out street.

A newly installed anti-aircraft unit in a close-by park opened fire on the approaching planes and, at that moment, a woman and her child slipped on the wet lower steps and people tripped over the fallen pair in the dark. The crowds of people eager to get to safety were unaware of the accident below and continued to walk steadily down stairs and into a tumbling pile of human bodies.

In a very few minutes three hundred people had fallen on their friends and neighbours and 173 were soon dead. – 84 women, 62 children and 27 men. Over 90 were injured. It turned out to be the worst single civilian disaster of the 2nd World War in the UK, yet no bombs were involved. It took them until 11:40 to retrieve all of the bodies from the station.



Bethnal Green air raid shelter

At the entrance to Bethnal Green Garden, on the way to the library, there is a memorial to the people who suffered in this disaster. It is called the Stairway to Heaven and was designed by the architect Harry Paticas of Arboreal Architecture.



Stairway to Heaven memorial

The gardens are also the last remnant of the village green of old Bethnal Green village.

After looking at the monument and reflecting on this tragedy cross Cambridge Heath Road and turn down Bethnal Green Road heading



west. A few of the elements of the Victorian road still exist, with newer buildings mainly replacing ones destroyed by bombs during WW2. One building to note is the cream coloured single storey building on your left on the corner of Pott Street. This is W. English and sons, one of the old established East End funeral directors. The Krays both started their funeral processions from here, down to Vallance Road (where they were born) before ending up at St Matthew's church.

The Market stalls begin after Wilmot Street on your left, which is part of the Waterlow

Estate comprising Wilmot, and neighbouring Corfield, Ainsley and Finnis Streets. The estate was built by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company starting in 1869. They became Bethnal Green Council properties between the wars.

So, as we turn and walk down this street, we can admire the tall, elegant late Victorian/Edwardian blocks of flats but try to remember to turn right into a narrow passageway between them in order to reach the open space called Weavers Fields.

This is a park laid out after the Second World War clearing out an area that had suffered from heavy bombing during the war. The narrow, tightly packed streets had once housed



Huguenot

weavers (religious refugees from Northern Europe who had settled here and had brought their silk weaving skills with them) and had then grown into a great rabbit warren of streets where weavers, dyers and so on lived and worked. In 1777, John Wesley visited this area and wrote in his Journal, "I began visiting our Society who lived in Bethnal Green. Many of these I found in such poverty as few could conceive without seeing it." By 1840 there were 6 times the number of looms here than in Spitalfields and Mile End combined.

There are a number of artworks in the park that reflect the area's silk weaving history; wind-vanes depict silk moth and mulberry leaves (used in silk weaving) whilst the entrance sign (to your right as you approach the main sculpture) is 'interwoven' with metal, as if textile. The artist, Peter Dunn, created the sculpture



Sculpture



Oxford House

“Weaving Identities”, linking local sporting achievements of local young people the weaving heritage of the area. It is surrounded by four-hundred bricks, hand-carved by local young people.

The large redbrick building by the entrance to the park is Oxford House which was built in 1884 and was the first “settlement house” to open where students and graduates from Keble College, Oxford undertook a period of residential volunteering to learn first-hand about the realities of urban poverty. These volunteers were either graduates or worked locally and lived upstairs in Oxford House which was run like a mini Oxford college (with servants!) in the heart of Bethnal Green.

Continue along the path and leave the park then use the zebra crossing on your right to cross Vallance Road, where, just to your right you will see a modern archway where you can enter and walk through a Local Authority housing estate. You will eventually reach Buckfast Street and then Sale Street where you will see, in front of you, the gate leading into the grounds of St Matthew’s Church.

You will have to walk through the old Churchyard until you reach the front of the church which is a handsome building with a very chequered history.

It too was badly bombed during WW2 and has been beautifully restored and new interior design includes a number of fine works by modern artists and craftspeople. It also incorporates a number of artefacts from other churches that were destroyed during the war. This is a vibrant and active church founded in 1746 with a rich history. For example,



In 1809 Joshua King became Rector and installed himself in the parish, unlike many Rectors of the time who installed a “perpetual curate” to do the parish work while they lived off the stipend elsewhere (his predecessor was Rector from 1766 and never set foot in the parish!). King uncovered a great web of corruption and fraud among the parish



officials, led by the Churchwarden Joseph Merceron who ran brothels in the local pubs, which he licensed, manipulated the “poor funds” and ran protection rackets too. King eventually succeeded in having Merceron sent to prison in 1818.

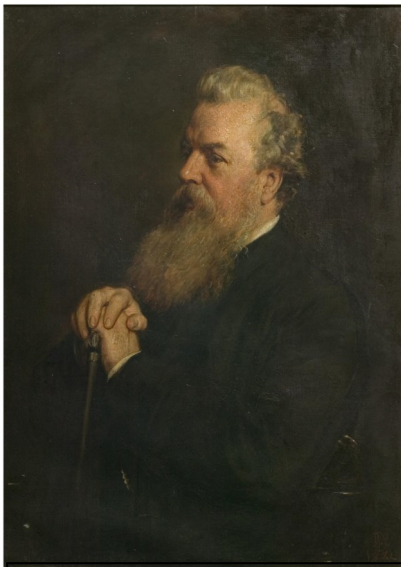




Arthur Foley Winnington Ingram by Albert Howard Hester National Portrait Gallery

Shortly after this King left Bethnal Green and, on his release from prison, Mercer, with King gone, went back to business as usual until his death in 1861. Ironically his family's grand memorial tomb, stating that he "lived to an honourable old age", is one of only two to survive the WW 2 bombings.

Other major characters include Stewart Headlam, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewart_Headlam) who was a curate at St Matthew's from 1873 -78 under the redoubtable Septimus Hansard. Here Headlam founded the Christian socialist Guild of St Matthew in 1877. Arthur Foley Winnington Ingram (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Winnington-Ingram), who headed the Oxford House Settlement, was also Rector here; he became Bishop of London in 1901. Kenneth Leech was Rector of St Matthew's from 1974 to 1979 (<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/>



Portrait of Septimus Hansard by Dickinson, Lowes Cato, V&A

On the following pages you will find the factsheet for St Matthew's, a reflection, a Bible reading, an Unlock story, a prayer and an activity.



PLEASE DONATE TO SUPPORT UNLOCK'S WORK

- Online via Virgin Giving : http://www.unlock-urban.org.uk/support_donations.php
- By Bank Transfer to Account No: 65031179; sort code: 08-92-50, quoting ref: walk
- By cheque to 'Unlock', mailed to: Unlock, Handsworth Old Rectory, 402B Handsworth Road, Sheffield, S13 9BZ

Due to COVID 19 the Unlock Office will be running on extremely minimal staffing over the summer of 2020.

Donations via Virgin Giving and Bank Transfer save Unlock money and time, and get the funds into our account much faster. Cheques will take considerably longer to process in the current circumstances.

For this year only, we will not be able to acknowledge individual donations (donations via Virgin Giving will be acknowledged automatically) , as we will have neither the staff nor the necessary details to do so.

Please be assured that we are more grateful than we can possibly say for your generous and faithful support.

Begin at the beginning

St Matthew's Bethnal Green is the Mother Church of Bethnal Green. Until the 18th century, Bethnal Green was a sleepy rural hamlet, part of the greater parish of St Dunstan's Stepney. In 1743, following the failure of the 50 Churches Act of 1711 to actually produce 50 churches (in the end 12 were finished), the parish of Bethnal Green was finally authorised and work began on the church. Soon after worship began in this place, with hundreds in attendance. John Wesley preached here at least three times, in 1775, 1788 & 1791. The new church was full to the rafters: only 20 years after completion, new supports had to be added to the galleries to increase the capacity from 1200 to 2000 people.

Victorian extremes

During the 18th and 19th century, the Industrial Revolution was moving at a quick pace, and people were flocking to London for work, leading to these situations of overcrowding. Through this all, St Matthew's sought to help those in need and provide work and education where possible for those left behind by the economics of the day. This was a time when Church of England parishes all over the city were leading the way in promoting education for all, regardless of their financial background.

During the Victorian Era, St Matthew's became part of a revival movement in the Church of England known as the Oxford



St Matthew's Bethnal Green

EST 1746

Movement. Stressing the beauty of ritual, hymn-singing, good teaching and the importance of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) in worship, the Oxford Movement has shaped St Matthew's practice and theology to this day. St Matthew's has a strong historical link with Oxford House, a university settlement further west down Bethnal Green Road. Founded as a house of residence for young adults involved in service and social action in the community, St Matthew's clergy and lay leaders would have known about and cooperated with these efforts.

Bombing & rebuilding - 20th century legacy

In an air-raid bombing on the first day of the Blitz in 1940, the church suffered a direct hit and was left a roofless shell. Photographs of this time show the undaunted spirit of the churchgoers, worshipping in the rubble and open air. Things were tough after the war, and it took nearly 20 years for the building's full restoration. In the meantime a 'tin tabernacle' was erected in the churchyard, most of the tombstones having been removed as they were unrecognisable. The new church was reconsecrated in 1961, and it houses the legacy of many other churches not so fortunate as to be rebuilt. The St Philip's Chapel houses our only stained glass window from St Philip's Swanfield Street, and our Organ was cobbled together from the remains of pipe organs in several bombed churches. Later in the 1980s, the church inherited the furnishings of St James the Great — known locally as the 'Red Church' — when that parish and St Matthew's were

amalgamated. The history of working together with other Christians for the good of all amidst the chances and changes of life...this is all in St Matthew's DNA.

Ministry Today

St Matthew's is a place many people call home. On our last count we had at least a dozen 'mother tongues' spoken in our congregation; the youngest of the faithful is 1 year old and the eldest is 98. We are both very local, and also have some who come in from different parts of London. We maintain a liberal anglo-catholic tradition of worship which focuses on the Eucharist, encouraging personal prayer and devotion as well. We are proud of our membership in Inclusive Church movement, taking a stand on matters of injustice with regard to disability, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and economic power. In 2019 St Matthew's also joined London Citizens, as we explore together what it means to be a church that does Community Organising, seeking the common good of our community. We are involved in interfaith friendship and work with our neighbours of other faiths, particularly Muslims, and we support the work of St Matthias School with teaching and governors.

Prayer requests

We'd love your prayers at St Matthew's for the following:

- Our newly opened (2020) Food Bank and its development and vision
- Our Community Organising initiatives
- Our work with outreach and discipleship at all ages
- The development of our work with children and young people

We'd love you to pray that God would bless us with all the people, resources, growth in faith and commitment that we need to be faithful into the next chapter of our parish life.



St Matthew's Church, Bethnal Green
St Matthew's Row, Bethnal Green, E2 6DT

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Reflection

The East End was very heavily bombed during the Second World War. The bombing, or Blitz, was an attempt to damage the health and spirit of ordinary people across Britain. So, the bombs damaged homes and shops, churches and schools, hospitals and places of entertainment as well as the docks and factories.

After the bombing, people would come out of the shelters in the morning and walk home through ruined streets where neighbours houses used to be and wonder if their own family home was still intact. They would pass shopkeepers marking the perimeter of their shops with string and little wooden spikes as the ruins still smouldered behind them.

Stories would spread about who had not survived the night and people would already be clearing the roads of debris and cordoning off dangerous sections of the street from the general public.

If you look at photographs from that time you will not recognise the places we have walked through. They often look like the images we see from Iraq or Syria today.

And today, in the market and on the streets, you will pass people who will remember playing on bomb sites as children. Some will be old and remember post war Britain and some will be much younger and remember doing the same in places like Iraq or Afghanistan.

The parks are a positive sign of change. The new homes and businesses showed our resilience and determination; and the churches used their communities and their connections to support people in need and help them find safe places to live and the means to get back on their feet again.

Consider what this means for us today. Do we have neighbours and friends at church who have experienced conflict or war? Do we know how such experiences affect us and what can be done to help those who have suffered?

Unlock Stories:

History of Violence.

A story from an Unlock worker. Trev has spent most of his life wrestling with drug addiction. He receives benefits once every two weeks and has usually spent most of the money by the evening of the day he receives it. Recently Trev was at a friend's house with a few people and a dealer – late in the evening Trev and another person fell out over money, Trev was beaten up and thrown out of the house. I heard from someone else in the area that Trev – who has a long history of violence - had gone back to the house late at night apologised for his actions and told the other party that they were forgiven. Needless to say, this took everyone by surprise! Speaking to Trev later that week I discovered that he remembered a similar incident over six months ago which we had spent some time together reflecting on using the Unlock cycle – this had prompted him to think about, and ultimately change – his response to this incident.



History of Trauma.

With one of the church visitors, I have met with a Zambian woman in the community who attends the church. She was delighted that we visited her in her house – we were the first people who had been there. She said that she felt really loved.

She was having troubling flashbacks to unpleasant events in her past. The last time I spoke to her the prayers and activities I had shared with her had resulted in her having no more flashbacks and feeling much more loved by God.



Psalm 10:14

But you do see;
you take notice of
trouble and
suffering and are
always ready to
help.

The helpless
commit
themselves to
you; you have
always helped the
needy.

PRAY FOR victims of war, oppression
and acts of violence. Ask God to
consider their grief and take it in hand.

*Loving Father, I pray that those in my
community who have experienced the
shock and pain of violence can be
given the support and love that they
need. Guide us in how we might
support this work and we pray that
you reach into the darkness of people's
hearts and soothe their pain. Amen*

ACTIVITY

Consider how your church and community have
provided support to people who have escaped
from experiences of trauma and conflict. Just
because we can't get together right now does not
mean that we can't make time to
listen to people and help them
share their stories. How can you
show that you care?



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