

Whitechapel

South of Spitalfields is Whitechapel. Dominating the area is the enormous London Hospital and the surrounding 'rag' trade - the shops, workshops and factories making and selling clothing.

Places of interest include the very old Whitechapel Bell Foundry, which still makes bells, the East London Mosque and the London Furniture College, the Tube Station⁷ and the Whitechapel Art Gallery. There is a street market open every day opposite the Hospital, at one end of which is a new, small and very odd restaurant in a purpose-built modern building on the pavement that used to be a public convenience.

Aldgate has two claims to fame, a one way system that receives a daily mention on morning traffic reports and Middlesex Street, better known, but not officially, as Petticoat Lane. This is a vast Sunday morning street market where stall-holders who pretend to be Cockneys, but actually live in Chigwell, sell tons of rubbish to customers who pretend to be Londoners, but probably come from 'Sahf' (south) London - another place altogether.

The Salvation Army and Dr Barnados both have their roots here, born of poverty, unemployment and squalor. Jack the Ripper preyed on prostitutes in the alleys and back-streets. The Elephant Man, too, lived thereabouts.

Whitechapel, Stepney and Wapping were the centre of the fascist movement in the 1930s, with rabble-rousing rallies led by Oswald Mosley and his blackshirts. It is curious that the East End can espouse both the Socialism and Pacifism of Lansbury at the same time as Anarchism at Sidney Street and the National Socialism of Mosley. There remains a small relic of the anarchist movement in a small bookshop in an alley near the Whitechapel Gallery and the leftovers of fascism can be seen selling their broadsheets at the end of Brick Lane on Sundays.

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Last update: **2008/02/11 00:58**

