Introduction

The history of London is often recorded in terms of waves of new arrivals and their impact on the city. Nowhere in the capital is this more evident than in East London. With its docks and a long tradition of welcoming immigrant populations from all over the world, Tower Hamlets’ shifting populations have always reflected changes in national and global politics.

Black people have been a feature of East London life since Roman times. Their presence throughout successive eras serves as a reminder of Britain’s slave trade, the nation’s maritime history and the origins and resilience of one of Britain’s earliest visible minority communities.

The walks in this leaflet bring us into contact with the full spectrum of these experiences – from poets to parlour-maids, from revolutionary writers to runaways. We will follow in the footsteps of individuals who made history and of those forgotten by it.

Walk 4

Tower Hill to Museum in Docklands
Sailors, Scribes and Slaves

Starting point  Tower Hill tube station
Finishing point  Museum in Docklands
Estimate time  2.5 hours

Start at Tower Hill tube station. Turn right as you leave the tube station into a green park, which is Trinity Square Gardens (1). In Trinity Square Gardens is a memorial to the merchant seamen who lost their lives in World War Two. Many African
sailors' names can be found on the memorial. As you look to your left you can see the Tower of London, one of the most historic buildings in England and a one time Royal Palace. The Tower contains the British Crown Jewels, one of the finest collections of jewels in the world. In 1692 a 16-year-old black slave of Thomas Dymock, the Lion Keeper at the Tower's menagerie, fled from captivity taking with him £10 in silver and one guinea. What became of him is not known.

Beyond the Tower is the River Thames and, more specifically, the Pool of London. At the height of the British Empire this area was the busiest port in the world. Many of the goods would have been brought in from the Caribbean, often from slave plantations. This stretch of water appears in the opening shots of the 1936 Paul Robeson musical Song of Freedom, the first film to highlight the multi-ethnic population of the docks.

This part of the river has historically been both a point of arrival and departure – forced and voluntary – for black and other immigrant groups. East London's visible minority populations increased significantly during the period of transatlantic slavery. Most black immigrants got their first view of London from the Thames, some were brought here as 'slave-servants', others found work as sailors or dock workers and settled along the riverside.

Retrace your steps past Tower Hill tube station and the remains of the roman wall until you get to the traffic lights. Cross with Tower Gateway DLR station on your left and go straight up Shorter Street and on the right you will see Tower Bridge. You now enter Royal Mint Street (2). This street used to be known as Rosemary Lane and was one of the worst slums in London. This neighbourhood was the home of the Chartist agitator David Anthony Duffy who was described as walking about 'without shoe or stocking'. He was arrested in April 1848 as one of the organisers of a Chartist demonstration in Kennington which ended in a riot.
Head up Royal Mint Street to its junction with Dock Street. A little way down Dock Street, on the left side of the road, you will see a plaque on a building commemorating the ‘Battle of Cable Street’ (3) on 4th October 1936 when groups of Jews, dockers of all ethnic groups, communists and ex-servicemen successfully prevented the Blackshirt followers of Sir Oswald Mosley (the leader of the British Union of Fascists) from marching into the East End to attack the Jews.

Cross over Dock Street and keep walking straight ahead. The street becomes Cable Street (4), which gave its name to the infamous battle.

This area has had a history of black settlement for the last three centuries. The neighbouring street of East Smithfield was the site of The Shovel public house where on 29th June 1787 local constables were beaten and ‘turned out’ of the pub by over 40 black drinkers. In 1919 Cable Street was the scene of one of the race riots which erupted across Britain and the United States of America. In Britain, white colonial soldiers were prominent in these riots, often attacking local black communities which had grown up in the port cities and established greater social and economic independence than was possible in the colonies. In Cable Street racists objected to white women fraternising with black men living in the street. A café in the street was set alight and gunshots fired. This wave of violence took place as the Paris Peace conference rejected the Racial Equality Proposal put forward by Japan. It also contributed to the development of independence movements in Africa and the Caribbean and the rapid evolution of Marcus Garvey’s pan-african Universal Negro Improvement Association.

By the 1950s so many black residents had settled in this district that the area around Golding Street, Greenfield Street and Cable Street was known as ‘the Harlem of London’.

Walk down the street and take the first road to your right, Ensign Street. Then turn into the first small alley on your left, Grace’s Alley. After a few steps you come to a rather dilapidated building called Wiltons (5). In the 19th century it was one of the most famous music halls in London seating audiences of 3,000 people. In common with similar Victorian institutions it helped to popularise the ‘minstrel’ phenomenon with white performers such as Messrs Duriah and
Davis in 1865. The Methodist East End mission took it over in 1888 and the famous (or infamous) mahogany bar was converted into a coffee house for around 1,000 people. It had beds for 30 people and there were always black sailors seeking accommodation here.

It closed in 1956 and there were plans to demolish it. However, protestors led by the poet laureate Sir John Betjeman objected and it was taken over by Broomhill Opera which staged the first all-black Carmen, the South African mystery plays and a black version of The Beggar’s Opera. HRH The Prince of Wales has recently become Wilton’s first Patron and the trust is now raising funds for an extensive refurbishment of this Grade II listed building.

Continue along Grace Alley to Wellclose Square, turn first left up Fletcher Street into Cable Street again and then turn right. On a site opposite 74-87 Noble Court (6) was the house (now demolished) lived in by Bandele ‘Tex’ Ajetunmobi, the photographer, whose photographs were ‘rediscovered’ in an exhibition at the Spitz Gallery in October 2002.

Continue walking along Cable Street until you get to Cannon Street Road. Up the street to the left is what used to be called Bigland Street School (7) and is now called Mulberry Girls School. This is one of the schools where the Guyanese writer ER Braithwaite taught. Braithwaite was an engineer who, despite having served as a bomber pilot in the Royal Air Force in WWII, could not get a job because of his colour. He then trained as a teacher. His experiences of teaching were set out in the book To Sir With Love. This book was later turned into a film starring Sidney Poitier. This area was also the focus of James Greenwood’s 1874 article A Visit to Tiger Bay which documented the black and Asian presence in this area.

Go right down Cannon Street Road until you come to the magnificent baroque church St. George in the East (8), one of three churches in the borough designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor, Christopher Wren’s assistant. Many black baptisms took place here including that of a 15-year-old slave, Anne Clossen. She promptly left her master and negotiated very well-paid employment (£7 per annum) with a local surgeon.

As you go up the steps of the church look to your right and look for the rigging of sailing ships. This is Tobacco Dock, a Grade 1 listed warehouse designed by the engineer John Rennie in the early 1800s. It is sobering to think that at the
time it was opened the tobacco was brought in from slave plantations in Virginia, America. If you look to the left as you go up the steps you will see the now abandoned St. George in the East School (9) behind 206 Cable Street. This school was the first school in the East End where the Guyanese author ER Braithwaite taught.

Go to the right, around the church and into the churchyard at the rear. Head diagonally across to the left and you will come to a neo-classical building called St. George’s Town Hall (10), which served as the Town Hall for this area for many years. You will see a large and colourful mural (11) on the west wall commemorating the Battle of Cable Street. There is only one black protester featured on the mural, just above the banner reading ‘They Shall not Pass’. The mural was first painted by David Binnington in 1979. It was vandalized by right-wingers in 1982 and repainted by the artist Ray Walker in 1982-83. He relied a great deal on contemporary photos in painting it.

Take a long walk now, right to the end of Cable Street. On your way you’ll pass by an interesting variety of housing, including a selection of large warehouses now converted into artists’ studios. From the left hand side of Cable Street carefully cross Butcher Row using the traffic island. Turn right, then left into a small park. Go through the park, across the footbridge and left into Horseferry Road. Follow the road around to the right and turn left into Narrow Street, crossing the entrance to Limehouse Basin, another of the East End’s historically busy dock areas. In 1827, Thomas De Quincey described the area in his work On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts as “a most chaotic quarter of eastern or nautical London...Every third man at the last might be set down as a foreigner. Lascars, Chinese, Moors, Negroes, were met at every step.”

Walk along Narrow Street and at the statue of the Herring Gull turn left into Ropemaker’s Fields. Turn left across the fields, cross over the canal bridge to Island Row, continue to Commercial Road, which was built by the East India and West India Companies to facilitate the transportation of goods from the colonies into London.
Keep walking on eastwards and fairly soon on your left, on the corner of Salmon Lane, you will see an impressive building (now a block of apartments) known as The Mission (13). It was originally known as the Empire Memorial Hostel and was opened in 1924. Every day of the year 2-3,000 seamen with no homes to go to arrived in the port of London, with its 32 miles of docks. These men would earn no more money until they were signed to another ship. The British Sailors’ Society was chief among those organisations tasked with catering for the urgent needs of these men. In 1917, presiding over the Ladies’ Guild of the Society, the Dowager Lady Dimsdale inaugurated the scheme to build the Empire Memorial Hostel as a memorial from the whole Empire to the 12,000 merchant seaman of all races across the British Empire who died in the First World War. It was felt that the most appropriate way of honouring the dead would be through looking after their living descendants and companions.

Contributions flooded in from across the globe, from the dominions and the colonies and according to Syren and Shipping, 22nd May 1929, it was “admirably equipped and most efficiently maintained with sleeping accommodation for 205 men, each in a separate, clean airy cabin.”

Syren and Shipping’s 1929 account also gives us an indication of the Hostel’s popularity and standing at the time: “Since the Empire Memorial Hostel was opened in Commercial Road in 1924, it has provided accommodation for very nearly one million men.” They reported that “letters are constantly being received from all over the world containing requests for the reservation of rooms for men expecting to arrive in London.”

Following the closure of the docks in the 1960s and 1970s, the Hostel lost its seamen and finally closed in 1979. The Hostel was sold, briefly became a ‘home’ for the homeless but then closed in 1985. In 1994, it was sold to a property developer who converted it into 50 private flats and gave it a new name ‘The Mission’.

Go past the old Limehouse Town Hall until you come to the church of St. Anne’s Limehouse (14), another church by the great baroque architect Nicholas Hawksmoor.
Curve right along the West India Dock Road. On the corner is the **Passmore Edwards Sailors’ Palace (15)** – the British and Foreign Sailors Society. The carving over the doorway includes Africa in the countries and continents listed. Today, this building is made up of modern flats.

Shortly afterwards, on your left, is Limehouse Police Station. To the right of the police station is a block of flats called West India House, opened in 1946 by Clement Attlee. It was originally the site of the Strangers Home for Asians, Africans and South Sea Islanders which was established in 1857.

Walk on across Westferry Road. As you turn right into Hertsmere Road you pass the site of the former Charlie Brown’s pub which was much frequented by sailors from the Caribbean. Sadly it was demolished when the Limehouse Link was built in the early 1990s. Walk past the Dockmasters House with the cinema on your left. In front of you will see the rear of the **Museum in Docklands (16)**. Bear right past the building and turn left past the Ledger pub. Just before you turn left you will see a large memorial plaque on the wall commemorating the opening of the West India Docks in 1802. The names on the plaque include many City financiers who owned large slave plantations in the Caribbean. The docks were specifically created to guarantee the safe handling of their sugar, rum, coffee and timber. Only a third of the warehouses were left after the bombing in WWII. One of the warehouses has been turned into the Museum in Docklands, which depicts the history of the docklands including an overview of the transatlantic slave trade.

If you stand with your back to the entrance of the museum, to the southwest you will see a reconstructed arch, crowned by a ship called *The Hibbert*, which was first erected in 1807 in memory of George Hibbert, an alderman and plantation owner who was instrumental in establishing the docks. In the same year the bill abolishing the slave trade throughout the British Empire was passed.
Museum in Docklands

The Museum in Docklands charts the history of the area from the Roman Thameside trading post through to the Canary Wharf Development in the 1980s and 1990s. Opened in 2003, this former rum, coffee, cotton and sugar warehouse with its atmospheric exposed brickwork and timber floors, is now home to a fascinating exploration of the area’s 2000 year history. Archaeological finds, models, photographs, testimonials and re-creations explore the lives of those who built and shaped the port’s long riverfront, from yesterday’s gentleman pirates to today’s city workers.

Through touchscreen interactives visitors are led by Time Team’s Tony Robinson to explore the early ports of London, from the Saxon settlement in Covent Garden to the medieval port at Billingsgate. Enormous whale-bones mark one of the uses of the early wet docks at Rotherhithe in the 18th century, when London was at the centre of the world whaling trade, while a gibbet cage set at the end of a re-creation of a legal quay reveals the fate of those engaged in piracy and is particularly popular with the Museum’s younger visitors!

In ‘Sailortown’, wander through 19th century alleyways, when ships jostled to unload their wares, the air was suffused with the smells of exotic goods, and the sound of different languages echoed along the wharves. In ‘London, Sugar and Slavery’ discover the capital’s untold involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and be touched by the real objects and personal stories that have left their legacy on the city today.

Museum in Docklands also has a children’s section called ‘Mudlarks’ which enables under 11s to explore aspects of the area through interactive play. There is also an on-going programme of events, study days, courses and workshops on a variety of topics, for adults and children.

Museum in Docklands

History walkers can get two full-price admission tickets for the price of one until 31st March 2008. Just show this guide at the ticket desk when you visit Museum In Docklands. Annual ticket £5 (you can visit as many times as you like in a year). Concessions £3. NUS cardholders and children under 16 FREE.

Museum in Docklands is located at West India Quay, London E14 4AL
Tel: 0870 444 3857
Opening hours: daily 10am - 6pm
www.museumindocklands.org.uk
Walk 5

Aldgate to Stepney Green

Priests, writers and statesmen

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<th>Starting point</th>
<th>St. Botolph's, Aldgate</th>
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<td>Finishing point</td>
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Start at the church of **St. Botolph's, Aldgate**, (1) the great 18th century church by George Dance the Elder. Black baptisms, marriages and burials have taken place in this parish since 1586. Aldgate also features in the opening paragraph of the book *To Sir With Love* by the Guyanese author ER Braithwaite, an autobiographical account of his career as a teacher in the East End. Near this church was the headquarters of the publishing company Archibald Bell which published the works of American Phillis Wheatley, which wasn't possible in America at the time due to segregation. Her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, published in 1773, is believed to be the first book published by a black woman in the English-speaking world.

Walk eastwards along Aldgate High Street and go under a subway, emerging at the Whitechapel High Street North exit. As you emerge from the subway look left up Middlesex Street - better known to the world as the site of the famous **Petticoat Lane Market** (2). In this street there lived one of the most famous authors of an 18th century slave narrative, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw. His 1772 book, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as related by himself* was the first. A more contemporary figure who achieved fame in this street in the 1930s was Ras Prince Monolulu who sold betting tips resplendent in 'traditional' African warrior garb, and who was still operating at this spot until the 1960s.
Continue eastwards along Whitechapel High Street until you get to the entrance of **Aldgate East Tube Station (3)**, on the corner of Commercial Street and Whitechapel High Street. It was at this junction (then known as Gardiners Corner) that barricades were built by Jews, dockers of all ethnic groups, communists and ex-servicemen on 4th October 1936 to prevent the leader of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley, from invading the East End to attack the Jews (See walk 4 on this point).

Cross over at the traffic lights and continue along the High Street until you come to the **Whitechapel Art Gallery (4)**. It was designed by the Arts and Crafts architect Charles Harrison Townsend and founded at the behest of The Rev Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta. From its foundation its policies were to give attention to art from all over the world. In 1995 it held an exhibition called 'Seven Stories about Modern Art' exhibiting work by African artists Koloane, Samb, Abdalla Kentridge and Emokpae. In 1998 it exhibited the work of the West Indian artist Aubrey Williams. In 2006 the East End Academy exhibition was curated by the artist Chris Ofili, winner of the Turner Prize in 1998.

Carry on eastwards. On your right you’ll see the East London Mosque with its dome and tower, and the adjacent London Muslim Centre.

When you get to Vallance Road, walk through Whitechapel Market until you stand before the **Royal London Hospital (5)**, one of the most famous in London. It has trained black doctors and nurses from all over the world. In 1890 Dr. Stratton Guinness, of the famous brewing family, visited Africa from his home in Bow. While in Nigeria he met Prince John Mandombi who suffered from a mysterious illness. He brought him back to the Royal London and a Dr. Fagen identified the disease as trypanosomiasis (or sleeping sickness). Despite the doctor's best efforts the Prince died but the event led to a great deal of research into the disease, which is prevalent in Africa again today. A plaque was put up in the ward where the Prince was treated.
Also associated with the hospital was the Dominican-born pan-African writer and lecturer Celestine Edwards who enrolled here to study medicine in 1893. He arrived in Britain in the 1870s after working as a seaman. He worked as a casual labourer and temperance lecturer before accepting the editorship of the Christian magazine *Lux and Fraternity*, the periodical of the Society for the Recognition of the Brotherhood of Man. He lived at 4 Gotha Road, Bethnal Green.

As you pass by Brady Street on your left you will see the new **Whitechapel Idea Store (6)**, one of Tower Hamlets Council’s 21st century library and learning centres. The architect of this 2006 RIBA award-winning building (and of the Chisp Street Idea Store in Poplar) is the exciting modern architect David Adjaye, who is of Ghanaian descent.

Opposite the Whitechapel Idea Store is the **Tower Hamlets Mission (7)**. Built in 1971, this is the only Methodist Mission left in the East End. On this site in the 18th century stood a inn called the White Raven Tavern. This inn (and the Yorkshire Stingo pub in West London) played a central role in the lives of many of black Londoners. It was here that the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor distributed alms and support on a weekly basis. In 1895, speaking about the life of the poor, Cecil Rhodes said, “I was employed in the East End of London yesterday and attended a meeting of the unemployed. I listened to the wild speeches, which were just a cry of ‘bread! bread!’ and on my way home I pondered over the scene and I became more than convinced of the importance of imperialism.” In the 1780s the aristocratic philanthropist Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, built a Zion church for the local black population. In the late 19th century, a Primitive Methodist church was also located there.

The Methodist Mission had originally been housed in the building above Whitechapel Tube station but moved into the old church in 1964. During the First World War the minister would take in black servicemen from the Empire to give them some home comforts. The Mission still cares for people of all races and faiths today.
Just opposite the entrance to the Tower Hamlets Mission is a statue of William Booth (8) – founder of the Salvation Army. Use the nearby crossing to go to the south side of Mile End Road, turn left and continue eastwards. Over the road you will see a large brown building which until the 1960s was Wickhams department store ('the Harrods of the East'). This site (69 Mile End Road (9)) was the home of the 18th century writer and Calvinist preacher John Marrant. Like many black Loyalists he settled in London after service with Britain’s armed forces in the American War of Independence. Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, arranged for his story to be published in 1785 – it was called A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a black now going to preach the Gospel in Nova Scotia. As a Methodist minister he led congregations of all colours in London and Canada.

Just past Wickhams is a white building which is now the Al-Hud Cultural Centre and Mosque (10). It caters for the Somali community in the borough which first started to arrive with seamen in the early 19th century. In the late 20th century, thousands of Somalis came to the UK to escape the civil war being waged in their own country. You will notice that on the other side of the road opposite Wickhams there are several Somali shops.

Keep on going eastwards and turn right into Stepney Green (11). It was here in 1632 that a ‘blackamoor’ by the name of Grace was presented by the churchwardens for ‘living incontinently with Walter Church’.
Go along the footpath, through the long park on the left, passing some of the finest Georgian houses in the borough. As you emerge from the park, in front of you through the trees, you will see the oldest structure (and certainly one of the most beautiful) in the East End, St. Dunstans & All Saints Church (12). Its backdrop shows one of the area’s newest structures – Canary Wharf in Docklands. The church was founded in the 8th century but the earliest parts of the present building date from the 13th century. The church falls within the domain of the Bishop of Stepney. Two former bishops, Joost De Blank and Trevor Huddleston, played a very prominent part in fighting apartheid in South Africa. History was also made here in 1995 when John Sentamu was made Area Bishop. He was born in Uganda and was the first black Anglican bishop in Britain. He was recently made Archbishop of York. He had been a judge in Uganda but fled after being persecuted by Idi Amin.

Continue eastwards past the roundabout. Continue along this road, go over the bridge and take the first turning left. The third turning on your left is Copperfield Road. The first set of buildings as you enter the road now house the Ragged School Museum (13). This property had previously been one of Dr Barnardo’s Ragged Schools. Barnardo famously declared “my candidates come from all over the world”. Current research reveals that over 5% of those who entered the Doctor’s East End establishments in the late 19th century were from a black or mixed race background.
Walk 4  Tower Hill to Museum in Docklands

1  Trinity Square Gardens
2  Royal Mint Street
3  Battle of Cable Street plaque
4  Cable Street
5  Wiltons Music Hall
6  74-87 Noble Court
7  Big'and Street School
8  St. George in the East Church
9  St. George in the East School
10  St. George's Town Hall
11  Battle of Cable Street mural
12  Limehouse Library
13  The Mission
14  St Anne's Limehouse
15  Passmore Edwards Sailors' Palace
16  Museum in Docklands

Walk 5  Aldgate to Stepney Green

1  St. Botolph's Aldgate
2  Petticoat Lane
3  Aldgate Tube Station
4  Whitechapel Art Gallery
5  Royal London Hospital
6  Whitechapel Idea Store
7  Tower Hamlets Mission
8  William Booth statue
9  69 Mile End Road
10  Al Hud Cultural Centre & Mosque
11  Stepney Green
12  St. Dunstans & All Saints Church
13  Ragged School Museum
Timeline

1586   Earliest records of black people in Tower Hamlets.

1596   Elizabeth I orders the expulsion of all black people from England.

1773   Phillis Wheatley publishes ‘Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral’.

1780   The Gordon Riots.

1786   Sierra Leone Scheme.

1807   The abolition of the slave trade.

1834   The Emancipation Act is passed.

1888   Walter Tull, one of Britain’s earliest black professional footballers, was born.

1919   Race riots in the East End and other British port communities.

1948   The Empire Windrush arrives at Tilbury Docks with 492 Jamaican passengers amongst others.

Did you know...

... that a Captain Sutherland was hanged at Execution Dock in Wapping in 1809 for murdering his black cabin boy?

... that John Newton (1725-1807), the composer of the great Christian hymns ‘Amazing Grace’ and ‘Glorious things of thee are spoken’ was born and grew up in Wapping. He went on to found the London Missionary Society which fought for the rights of the people of Africa especially in Southern Africa.

... that the first (and so far the only) black mayor of Tower Hamlets was the Ghanaian-born Kofi Appiah in 1992-93?

... that King Sobhuza II of Swaziland visited the black sailors at the Queen Victoria Mission in East India Road in 1926?

... 2003 Mercury Music Prizewinner, Dizzee Rascal, was born and grew up in Bow and went to Langland Park School?

... Claudia Jones, feminist, black nationalist, political activist, community leader, communist and founder of Britain’s first black weekly newspaper “The West Indian Gazette” also lived and worked in the area.
With grateful thanks to all involved in producing this guide including African Youthliners, Barnado's, Steve Martin, historian and presenter, the Local History Library, Minority Ethnic Business Federation, Museum In Docklands, Ocean African and Caribbean Community Association, The Tower Hamlets Afro-Caribbean Mental Health Organisation (Health Through History project).

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Jeffrey Green (Frank Cass)
Black Victorians/Black Victoriana
ed. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (Rutgers University Press)
London 1900, the Imperial Metropolis
Jonathon Schneer (Yale University Press)
Patterns of racism (Institute of Race Relations)
www.eastlondonpostcard.co.uk

Further information
Local History and Archive Library
Chris Lloyd, Bancroft Library, Tel: 020 7364 1290
Email: localhistory@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Tower Hamlets Afro-Caribbean Mental Health Organisation
C/o Social Action for Health, The Brady Centre,
192-196 Hanbury Street, London E1 SHU, Tel: 020 7247 1414
www.everygeneration.co.uk
www.100greatblackbritons.com
www.royalarmories.org/extsite/view.jsp?
sectionId=3079
www.whitechapel.org.uk

Places to go, things to do
To find out more about....

Eating and drinking
If you’re in need of refreshment on your walk visit one of the great cafes, bars and restaurants in the area.

Walks
Why not explore more aspects of the East End with our other guided walks. Visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk for more information.