



TOWER HAMLETS

# eastendlife

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR TOWER HAMLETS PRODUCED BY YOUR COUNCIL

This month **Graham Barker** takes a springtime stroll through the historic parks and streets of Bethnal Green and beyond. Photos by **Mike Askew**.

## Set off with a spring in your step

**SPRING can be an inspiring time to get out and about, with flowers, green shoots, buds and blossom breaking through. This walking route takes in some East End highlights including parks, canals, history and art.**

We start this month's walk at Bethnal Green Tube station. St John's Church (1) towers above you, with its elegant windows and golden weather vane. It was designed in 1825 by Bank of England architect Sir John Soane and holds a commanding position.

Cross at the lights in front of the church, and there, behind Paradise Gardens, sits Paradise Row, cobbled and narrow. The celebrated bare-knuckle fighter Mendoza the Jew lived at No 3 (2) and wrote *The Art of Boxing* here.

Continue along Bethnal Green Road, under the railway bridge and cross to the bow-fronted former police station – now home to Providence Row Housing Association.

Head alongside it, and bend right with Ainsley Street to reach Wilmot Street. The flats here, five storeys high and running the full length of the street, were built between 1869-75 by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company, led by social housing pioneer Sir Sydney Waterlow.

Take the turning by Nos 121-125 into Weavers Fields. After the colourful adventure playground, the green opens out. Head to the Weaving Identities steel sculpture (3) of sporting figures, one above the other – "If we see further today and tomorrow, it is because we stand on the shoulders of yesterday's seers" explains the plaque. The figures dance around a swirl of lustrous metal ribbons, echoes of 17th century Spitalfields silks.

Red-brick Oxford House (4) sits north of the park. It was the first university 'settlement', a place for students to work with disadvantaged communities. These days you can attend yoga, samba or sewing classes, or art exhibitions here.

Veer diagonally over the grass towards a



**St John on Bethnal Green Church is topped by a golden weather vane, visible from afar**

red-windowed warehouse and leave by a side gate, or walk along Derbyshire Street if you prefer. Then go up Hague Street and at Bethnal Green Road turn left, past the wood panelled café of E Pellicci (5), the antidote to chain coffee shops.

By the Marquis of Cornwallis, cross and head along Squirries Street. Head to the cluster of poplar trees and you'll see the ornate Queen Adelaide Dispensary (6), originally built to cope with a cholera epidemic.

Beside it, adorning the working men's club, is Banksy's flower painter (7) – sadly defaced, yet still remarkable.

Cross Gosset Street and curve left through Nelson Gardens. Cross at the zebra crossing and then head between two small greens and right along Durant Street, part of the Jesus Hospital Estate, designed in the 1860s as 'breakfast-parlour houses'.

Continue through Ion Square Gardens, glimpsing Columbia Road as you reach Hackney Road.

You now detour briefly out of the borough. To the left of Hackney City Farm (8) enter Haggerston Park, once the Imperial Gas Works. Tuilerie Street alongside marks the French tile makers who had kilns here. At the tennis courts, join the Woodland Walk as it skirts initially by the farm and then left uphill and around the BMX track.

On reaching Goldsmith's Row, turn left – beware of enthusiastic cyclists – cross to the Albion pub and continue on over the Regent's Canal hump-backed bridge. Ahead is Broadway Market (9), full of interesting independent shops, cafés and pubs. The Saturday farmers' market here offers breads, olives, cheeses and other tasty treats.

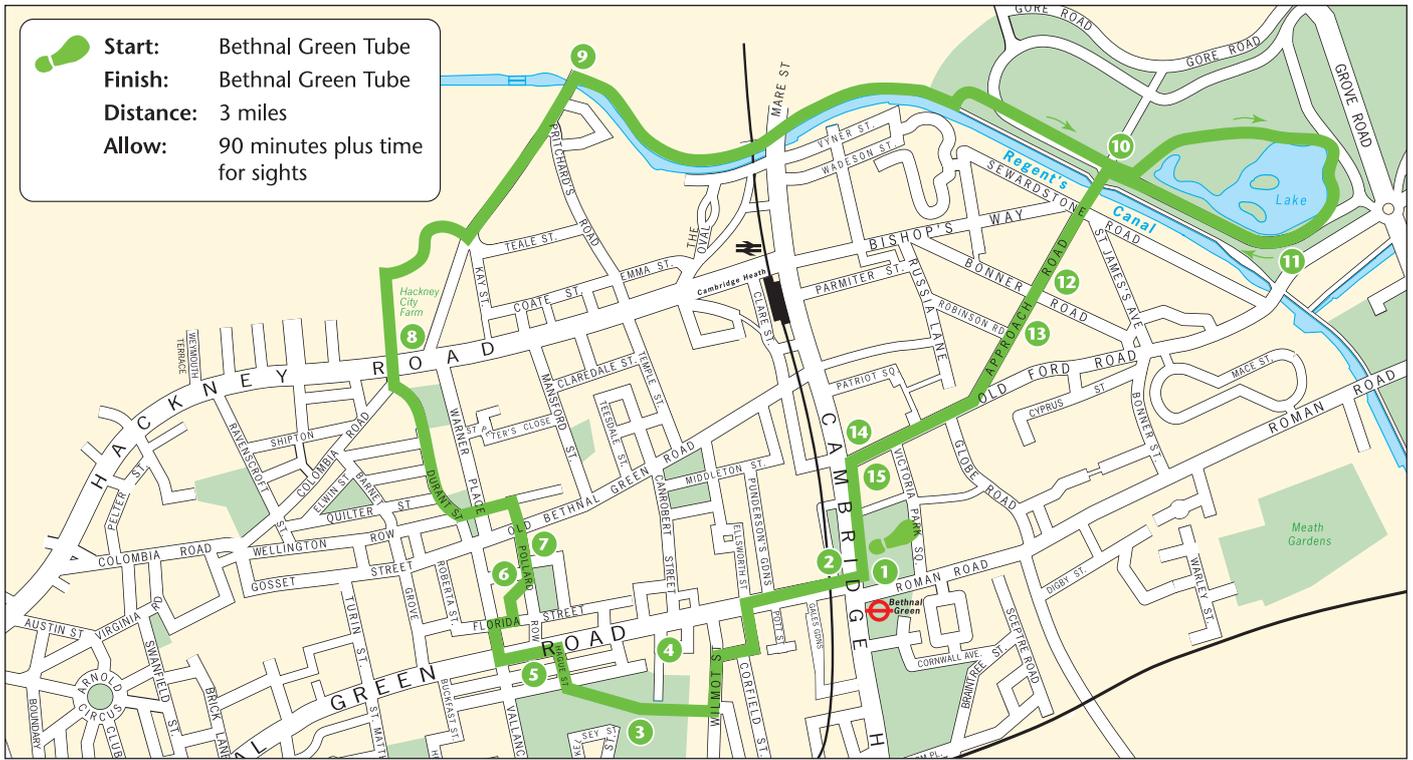
By the Sir Walter Scott step down to join the canal and follow the towpath past gas-holders and under two bridges. Go through Canal Gate into Victoria Park as it opens out on your left, and follow the road running parallel with the canal. (Note: until the end of April part of the towpath is closed for essential repairs. If you find it closed, follow the diversion shown on the boards, along Andrews Road, Vyner Street and Sewardstone Street, which brings you to the main Victoria Park gates.)

The impetus for Victoria Park was the Registrar General's observation in 1839 that "A park in the East End would probably diminish the annual deaths by several thousands... and add several years to the lives of the entire population."

After a 30,000-strong petition to Queen Victoria, land was secured and Victoria Park opened in 1850, with tree-lined avenues and lakes landscaped by James Pennethorne.

Beside Bonner Hall Bridge sit the two white Dogs of Alcibiades (10) – or they will once they return from restoration.

Enter the next section of park and take the left-hand tarmac path. The West Lake appears on your right. Aim for the glass-domed Pavilion Café (11), a place to watch



the coots, geese, ducks and swans, with the fountain beyond. There are loos here too.

Continue around the lake, and back to the bridge, and leave through the main gates.

Stroll down Approach Road, past the London Chest Hospital (12) – built in the 1850s to care for TB patients – and over a mini-roundabout. Look out for two children inset into the façade of Raine’s Foundation

School (13), dressed in blue uniforms.

At Old Ford Road, turn right and towards the end you’ll come to a cluster of the oldest buildings in Bethnal Green, many from the 1750s. York Hall (14) comes next, opened in 1929 by the Duke and Duchess of York and incorporating a swimming pool, gym, health spa and boxing hall.

Cross to the V&A Museum of Childhood (15), with its decorative panels depicting

agriculture and the arts. First built as a temporary museum in South Kensington after the Great Exhibition, it earned the nickname the ‘Brompton Boilers’. It was relocated and re-opened here in 1872 and now houses the UK’s national collection of children’s games and toys. Entry is free and you might visit the museum café at the end of your walk, before finishing back at Bethnal Green tube.



Number 3 Paradise Row was home to Daniel Mendoza



The canal-side walk passes by some imaginative graffiti



Gas holders near Broadway Market dominate the skyline



The woodland walk through Haggerston Park