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TOWER HAMLETS

eastendlife

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR TOWER HAMLETS PRODUCED BY YOUR COUNCIL

This month **Graham Barker** explores Shoreditch, Columbia Road and Brick Lane, home to busy markets and a vibrant street scene. Photos by **Mike Askew**.

Pastime paradise

WITH the opening of the new over-ground line, it's now even easier to reach Shoreditch and Brick Lane. And it's well worth the trip. Within just a few miles on this walk, we visit a succession of lively street markets, historic buildings, green spaces and funky café bars.

We start this month's walk at Shoreditch High Street station (1), on the newly-opened London Overground line. As you emerge left onto Bethnal Green Road, look back at the station – a textured concrete box, which will later be subsumed within a commercial development.

As the red-brick arches to your right suggest, this has long been a railway site – originally the 1840 Bishopsgate terminus for the Eastern Counties Railways and later the Bishopsgate Goods Yard.

Turn right and cross Bethnal Green Road at the crossing, to head along Club Row (2), home to St Hilda's East Community Centre. The street here once buzzed on Sunday mornings with birds and small pets – that market has disappeared, but you can still bag a bargain at Columbia Road or Brick Lane, which we'll visit later in the walk.

Look out for stripy brickwork and tall chimneys as you enter the Boundary Estate, started in 1890 as the world's first council housing, to replace the densely packed Old Nichol slums. The bandstand at Arnold Circus (3) sits on a mound created from the demolition rubble and spoil dug out during the construction works.

Follow Calvert Avenue left to Shoreditch High Street, where the tall former ware-



Arnold Circus celebrated its centenary with a picnic

houses and workshops have evolved into busy offices and trendy bars. As you turn right, look across to the decorative façade of the former Wells & Co foundry and showroom (4).

Closer by, you pass the small Clerk's House (5), once used as lodgings for the parish clerk. Head on, to explore St Leonard's Church (6), designed in the late 1730s by George Dance the Elder and renowned from the nursery rhyme line, "When I grow rich, say the bells of Shoreditch." If it's open, look inside at the

old parish stocks and whipping post, and a memorial to the many Tudor actors buried here.

Continue along Hackney Road, past Perseverance Works (7) – now a centre for creative businesses, with its eye-catching red sculpture. As you fork right onto Columbia Road, the Leopold Buildings (8) climb beside you, model flats built by the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company in 1872. It's hard to imagine that until 1960 there was a colossal gothic food market opposite, donated by Victorian philanthro-



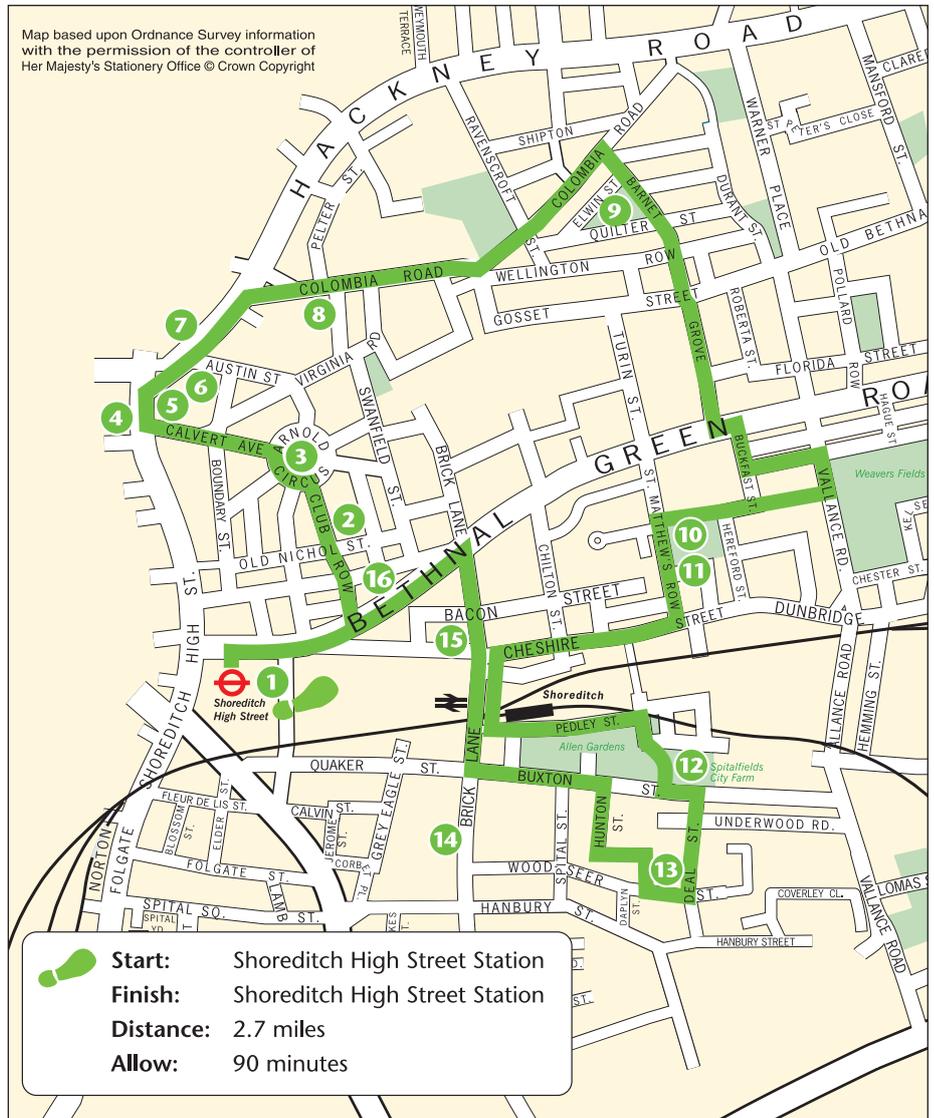
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pist Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts. These days you can stock up on armfuls of flowers at the Sunday morning market. Explore the shops, cafés and galleries too as you continue along, nipping in and out of the Ezra Street courtyards.

Turn right and follow Barnet Grove past a triangular green (9) – the centrepiece of the 1860s Jesus Hospital Estate – back up to Bethnal Green Road. Veer left, over the first crossing and head along Buckfast Street and Derbyshire Street. At Vallance Road – home to the Kray Brothers as youngsters – turn right and by the bus stop opposite Weavers’ Fields walk right between brick gateposts. Skirt the playground by Kinsham House and curve through to the gardens of St Matthew’s Church (10) – like Shoreditch, designed by George Dance the Elder. The church had to be largely rebuilt after being left a roofless shell by 1940 Blitz bombing. On the corner is the Watch House (11), originally a look-out for grave-robbers and later used as a fire station. Admire the mosaics of wildlife, fairgrounds and London landmarks at William Davis Primary School in Wood Close, before heading on to Cheshire Street, which is the main focus for the Sunday market.

Turn right and follow Cheshire Street to the end, passing shops selling quirky fashion, homewares and gifts en route. At Brick Lane – so named as the kilns here fired bricks to help rebuild the City after the Great Fire – go left under the railway bridge and first right to Allen Gardens. Wander through the gardens – passing the ‘shoe tree’ – and head on to explore Spitalfields City Farm (12) beyond, full of well-tended plants and friendly donkeys and sheep.

Opposite the main farm gate, head along Deal Street, and at the corner with Woodseer Street you’ll see the trim terraces of Victoria and Albert Cottages (13), evoking a sense of the old East End. Continue



skirting around St Anne’s Catholic Primary School railings to rejoin Buxton Street. Walk left, alongside Allen Gardens, back to Brick Lane.

Look left to the former Truman’s Brewery (14), towering up on both sides and now home to popular bars and clubs, guarded by eagles. Retrace your steps up Brick Lane and under the railway bridge. On the next corner, peer up to the trio of street signs

(15), spanning three centuries from “This is Sclater Street 1708”, and the nearby silvered Cultural Trail panel. Continue to the top of Brick Lane, busy into the small hours with hungry cabbies and clubbers at the 24-hour beigel shops. On Bethnal Green Road turn left, past the colourful, louvre-fronted Rich Mix cinema and arts venue, to return to Shoreditch High Street station, the end of our walk.



Green oasis of Spitalfields City Farm



A rainbow of shuttered shops on Columbia Road