

British Empire Walks

EAST INDIA ARMS

No 67

EAST INDIA ARMS

FENCHURCH STREET E.C.3

How they developed their heritage walks

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Cook
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EAST INDIA ARMS
The building was built in 1790 and was originally a coaching inn. It was later used as a warehouse and then as a bank. The building was converted into a pub in 1850 and has since become a famous London pub. The building is a Grade II listed building and is a fine example of Georgian architecture. The building is a fine example of Georgian architecture and is a Grade II listed building.

A Brick Lane Circle Publication

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To all those interested in learning about and promoting the learning of deeply buried historical connections between peoples and places...

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Introduction

M Ahmedullah
(Project coordinator)

In the UK, there has been a growing interest in learning about heritage and understanding the historical connections of peoples and places. Heritage walks as tools for learning about the past through visiting important historical sites and locations are becoming popular, and they also generate positive mental and physical well-being outcomes in people.

Brick Lane Circle has been organising heritage walks focusing on the East India Company's London presence since 2007 with Dr Georgie Wemyss and Nick Robins. Over the years, we have gained relevant expertise and knowledge and collected materials and developed lists of sources of information on the East India Company, the British Empire and places and locations across the globe from where the company operated its trading, administrative, educational and military operations. This pilot initiative, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, sought to help develop local skills and experience in heritage learning, focused on locations in East London with links to the British Empire and create an avenue for local income generation through heritage walks.

In this regard, the project recruited more than a dozen individuals from East London's diverse communities and provided them with training and visits to heritage institutions. They were mentored by professional heritage walking guides and supported to produce walking tour packs with details of their subject focus, a map, stops and narratives. In addition, we organised practical walking tours training, including role plays, to enable the participants to develop experience and confidence in running their tours independently.

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The main focus of the training was on East India Company Walks, based on our extensive experience running them and the materials we possess. However, the participants were encouraged to consider other British Empire themes, for example, West India Docks and Trans-Atlantic slavery, Limehouse China Town and the late 19th Century and early 20th Century Asian and Sylheti lascar seamen's experiences in the East End. The project directed participations to sources of information in heritage institutions, such as Tower Hamlets Local History and Archives and The London Archives, British Newspaper Archives and British History Online. They have fascinating stories linked to the British Empire, such as lascar funerals, lascar deaths in police custody, and many other incredible stories that could be incorporated into the walks. We also took them on physical visits to Tower Hamlets Local History and Archives and The London Archives to see examples of information and records they have and how to access them.

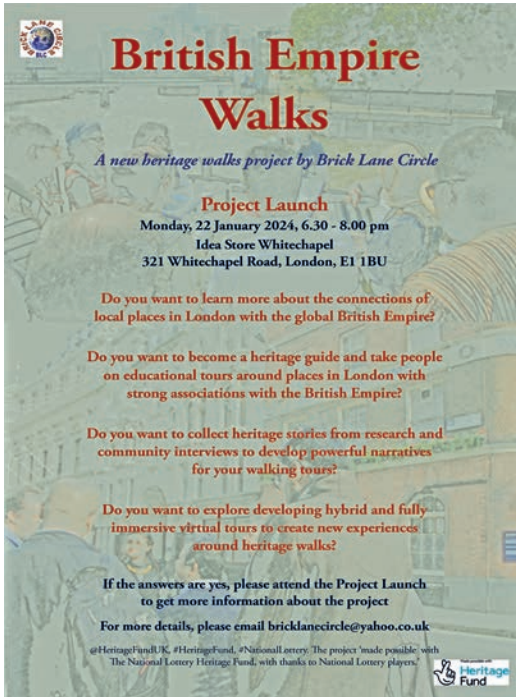
The training were provided Dr Georgie Wemyss, David Rosenberg and Manasi Pophale, consisting consisted of theoretical perspectives, purpose of heritage walks, how to make narratives and delivery interesting, preparation of heritage packs and marketing and practical experience of delivery under supervision. This was followed by the participants producing final packs and delivering trial heritage walks. In the end, a major project completion celebration was held on 20 February 2025 at the Idea Store Whitechapel to share the outcomes with the wider public and promote the walks. This booklet was also published on on the same day and distributed.



*Until a few years ago,
this plaque was on
the wall of an old
East India Company
warehouse in
Debonshire Square,
London.*

INTRODUCTION

Project Launch - 22 January 2024



British Empire Walks
A new heritage walks project by Brick Lane Circle

Project Launch
Monday, 22 January 2024, 6.30 - 8.00 pm
Idea Store Whitechapel
321 Whitechapel Road, London, E1 1BU

Do you want to learn more about the connections of local places in London with the global British Empire?

Do you want to become a heritage guide and take people on educational tours around places in London with strong associations with the British Empire?

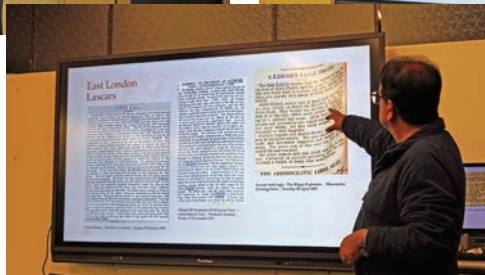

Do you want to collect heritage stories from research and community interviews to develop powerful narratives for your walking tours?

Do you want to explore developing hybrid and fully immersive virtual tours to create new experiences around heritage walks?

If the answers are yes, please attend the Project Launch to get more information about the project

For more details, please email bricklanecircle@yahoo.co.uk

@HeritageFundUK, #HeritageFund, #NationalLottery. The project 'made possible' with The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with thanks to National Lottery players.



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Project Induction - 7 March 2024



INTRODUCTION

History Walk and Training with David Rosenberg 20 April 2024

*Fighters for Equality: Suffragettes, anti-racists
and enemies of Empire walk and training*



East India Dock Company Walk with Dr Georgie Wemyss 6 April 2024



BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

**Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives visit
13 May 2024**



The London Archives visit - 22 May 2024



The Brave Jahazis

M Ahmed Choudbury

I was very excited when I first heard about Brick Lane Circle receiving funding for the British Empire Walks project. Over many years, I have attended many local history walks, including several by Brick Lane Circle. I found the idea of exploring historical connections between local landmarks in East London, particularly in the borough of Tower Hamlets, and the British Empire inspiring.

On several occasions, I requested Brick Lane Circle to run courses on history walks so I could learn how to deliver a walk on Sylheti lascars who worked on ships, jumped ships and settled in East London. Hearing about this project, which I have been suggesting for a long time, made me very happy. As such, I went to the project launch held at the Idea Store Whitechapel and signed up for the project. Besides me, there were about another dozen people who joined the project.

We were encouraged to become Heritage Guides (HG's) and lead fellow participants on educational tours centred on a specific aspect of the British Empire's legacy that interested each of us. The ultimate goal was to develop participants' confidence and skills to lead public walks.



Preparation for Becoming a Heritage Guide

The project organised an induction to welcome us and provide details and a timetable. Training and workshops followed, which provided participants with the context, knowledge, and skills needed to become effective Heritage Guides.

One of these was led by Dr Georgie Wemyss, who has more than two decades of experience running the East India Dock Company walks, specialising in East India Company stories in East London. This exclusive walk was arranged for participants, featuring fascinating historical stops and scenic sites along the River Thames.

The training sessions at the Idea Store in Whitechapel were packed with invaluable insights. Dr Wemyss shared her expertise, offering practical advice, theories and concepts related to heritage walks.

A particularly memorable element was the role-playing activity, where each participant took turns acting as a guide, leading an imaginary walk while receiving constructive feedback. Another helpful session involved working in pairs or small groups to plan and refine potential routes, which helped me design a more cohesive and engaging walk.

In April 2024, another walk was organised in Westminster, beginning at Caxton Hall and led by David Rosenberg, known for his “Taking Radical Footsteps – East End Walks.” Standing at Caxton Hall, where Udham Singh assassinated Michael O’Dwyer in 1940, was a powerful and moving experience. (If you are not familiar with these two characters, please come to my walks to learn more about them.)

In addition to the practical training, we also benefited from visits to the London Archives and Tower Hamlets Local History Archives and an online session conducted by Manshi Pophale, founder of History Speak. Her slideshows offered valuable tips on theoretical and practical aspects of heritage walks.

THE BRAVE JAHAZIS

My Pilot Walk

After completing the training, it was time to put our learning into action by organising and leading our own heritage walks. My walk was titled “The Brave Jahazis (Seamen).”

As a British Bangladeshi, I am deeply interested in exploring my historical roots. Although Sylhet, located in the northeastern region of Bangladesh, is around 300 miles from the sea, its people have a long-standing ship and boat-building tradition. Over centuries, they became pioneers among Bangladeshis working as seafarers on European and British vessels during the Age of Empire. As Ashfaque Hussain highlights in “The World of Sylheti Seamen in the Age of Empire” (Journal of Global History, 2014), Sylheti Seamaen played a significant role from the late 18th century to 1947.



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South Asian seamen were often referred to as Lascars. However, this term, laden with colonial connotations and associated with exploitation, is one I choose to avoid when possible. Instead, many prefer to use the original term “Lashkars”, I personally prefer the term “Jahazis” (sailors/seamen). These Jahazis endured severe hardships, often treated as subordinates, with lower wages, poor food and substandard accommodation compared to their European counterparts. Despite these challenges, Jahazis made immense contributions to the success of maritime European trade and the British Empire itself. My walk focused on notable figures such as Aftab Ali, Ayub Ali(master), and Surat Alley, who were not only seamen but also became entrepreneurs, trade unionists and social activists fighting tirelessly for the rights and welfare of South Asian, Arab, Chinese and African seamen.

The walk began at King’s Hall on Commercial Road, where a memorial meeting was held to honour Indian seamen who lost their lives during World War II. Ayub Ali and Abdul Majid Qureshi organised this event. The walk concluded at 13 Sandy Row, the former residence of Ayub Ali.



Looking Ahead

Having completed my pilot Heritage Guide walk, I am now planning to host similar walks every couple of months, inviting the public to join and explore this fascinating history.

The 'Strangers' Home Unearthing Invisible Seafaring Histories of Empire

Asif Shakoor

Recently, I had the privilege to lead a dozen highly successful and popular walking tours for several organisations under the title: 'Missing Medals: Unearthing Invisible Seafaring Histories of Empire' of the Royal Docks.

Through the Brick Lane Circle's last project, the British Empire Walks, I gained the opportunity to found and develop my first walk in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which covers the popular seamen's rest 'The Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders' 'on West India Dock Road. Whilst researching for my walk 'The 'Strangers' Home: Unearthing Invisible Seafaring Histories of Empire', I unearthed a vast amount of innovative research exploring information relating to 'lascars' and sites connected to their history, not commonly found in archives. One of these is an incident described as 'a dreadful riot' in Ratcliffe Highway involving a clash of 200 Indian 'lascars' and Chinese seamen, who arrived in ships of the East India Company from India. Several were severely wounded, and a further eighteen 'ringleaders' were arrested by the local Police. I learnt about this incident on Saturday, 11th October 1806, and it is recorded in a rare book, not from any newspaper archives.

The leading scholar on the South Asian presence in Britain recorded in her book 'Asians in Britain 400 Years of History' about the burial of a 'larskar' by the name of 'John Muhmud' at St. Anne's Church in Limehouse. I scavenged the grounds in the hope

of finding a headstone in his memory, not that one would have survived, as 'lascars' were often buried in unmarked public graves. I would have better described 'John Muhmud' as perhaps Jaan Mahmood or even Jaan Muhammad, names were often Anglicised. Rozina must be credited as having probably discovered the first or at least the earliest recorded burial of a 'lascar' seafarer in London, based on her research from the Parish records. Her book served as a basis for constructing the structure and very framework for my walk. Indeed, Rozina researched for and wrote her book in the 1980s, at a time when one had no access to the internet. She is owed a debt of gratitude for fifteen years of the arduous, hard physical labour of researching the India Office Records at the British Library in laying the very foundations for future research into the 'lascar' seafaring histories of the Empire.

During visits to the Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, I researched records of 'lascar' burials at St. Matthias Church in Poplar, (the first East India Company (EIC) chapel built in London for the men in service of the EIC in India). The records revealed later burials of 'lascars' on the grounds of the chapel, such as 'Salla Ahmed Ally, Asiatic Sailor' in the 1800s.

The Term 'Lascar'

The term 'Lascar' was historically used to describe Black, Asian and ethnic minority seafarers who served on British ships sailing from India in the 1600s. The original word, however, is Lashkar, not Lascar. The English diplomat Sir Thomas Roe first introduced the word lashkar into the English language in 1616. Later, in 1625, Sir Thomas Roe introduced the corrupted form lascar. This term is a misapplication and distortion of the Persian lashkar.

Many senior English officials in India had already been using lashkar before Sir Thomas Roe introduced the corrupted version lascar in 1625. For instance, William Biddulph used the word lashkar in 1621, while Robert Hughes and John Parker did so in

THE 'STRANGERS' HOME UNEARTHING INVISIBLE
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1622. Maritime scholar, Dr Gopalan Balachandran, equated the term lascar with coolie, thereby rendering it a derogatory term. The etymology of lashkar traces it from Urdu لشکر, which originates from the Persian word لشکر, meaning 'army' in both languages. Further, it can be traced back to the Arabic word عسكر al-'askir, also meaning 'army'.

I don't think my grandmother would have referred to my grandfather, Mahomed Gama, as a lascar. She would likely have asked, 'So what is that then? What does that mean? What is a lascar?'. My grandfather was a South Asian seafarer لشکر, and I never refer to him as a lascar. Such a term does not exist in Urdu or Persian linguistic dictionaries from the past century.

The "Lascar Depot" in West Ham

Around 1814 the East India Company established a hostel, called a "depot", for seafarers from the Indian sub-continent who came to London on the Company's ships. The depot was located in the parish of West Ham, and overseen by a "superintendent of lascars", a London merchant named Abraham Gole. There may have been a second hostel in Shadwell, accommodating seafarers from both the sub-continent and China.

The East India Company claimed to have a moral obligation to look after these seafarers. They stated that they "felt it to be their duty, to use every means their power to preserve from injury those natives of India who were employed in navigating the ships" that they owned, as well as those of other ship-owners. The Company claimed that the depot provided the seafarers "with every necessary comfort".

Abraham Gole provided board and lodging, "including tobacco" and conveyed the seamen to and from the docks, charging the East India Company a daily rate. In 1816 he reduced the charges, possibly because he feared that the hostel in West Ham would be closed after a petition against it was submitted by local residents.

Drawn up by the vicar of West Ham, the Reverend C. Jones, and signed by more than 100 local people, the petition claimed that the hostel had “become a great nuisance” to them and their families, though why was not clear. However, it seems that the petition was successful, because in 1818 the minutes of the government’s board of commissioners for India noted that the “depot” appeared to have closed.

‘Le Gestenhall’ - A Guesthouse for ‘Lascars’ in West Ham in the 1840s

A guesthouse for South Asian ‘lascar’ seamen once stood on the banks of the Channelsea River, a small tributary of the River Lea. The building, originally part of the Stratford Langthorne Abbey grounds, was recorded as ‘Le Gestenhall’ and was reportedly used to house ‘lascars’ in the 1840s. Today, a modern office block, likely Channelsea House on Canning Road (E15), occupies the site. This building is visible when travelling westbound on the District Line from West Ham Underground station and is situated adjacent to Masjid-e-Ilyas, a mosque (or Muslim place of worship).

‘Lascar’ Deaths and Burials in West Ham Cemetery

With the opening of the Victoria Dock in 1855, ‘Lascar’ seafarers began arriving at the port. As ‘lascar’ seamen arrived in England, many fell victim to tropical and sea-borne diseases, while others died in London from unexplained causes. Seafarers also frequently suffered from sexually transmitted infections and pneumonia, which were also rife among seafarers. Many seamen died shortly after embarking on their voyages.

Dozens of Muslim seafarers were subsequently buried in West Ham Cemetery, which officially opened in 1857. Among these burials was Abdul Rahman, who died at the Seamen’s Hospital and was laid to rest in West Ham Cemetery on 17th September 1901.

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The burials of 'lascar' seafarers were in unconsecrated, unmarked public graves.

Many ships, such as the *Belle of the Sea* under the command of Captain Lewis, docked at the Victoria Dock in 1858, bringing cargo and 'lascar' crew from Calcutta, British India. The *Belle of the Sea* was the first vessel from Calcutta to dock at the Royal Victoria Dock, arriving on 5th July 1858.

'Lascars'

The *Graphic*, from 6th August 1892, reported on 2,000 'lascar' seafarers professing "the creed of Mahomet" and observing 'Āshūrā' عاشوراء, the commemoration of Imam Husayn's martyrdom. They gathered at the renamed Royal Victoria Dock for a ten-day period in the first week of August. The article incorrectly remarked about 'the murder of Hasan and Hussein'. The commemoration of 'Āshūrā' عاشوراء, marks the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and not Imam Hasan. The article described in great depth the events of the procession, including a rather bizarre occurrence of the 'lascars' pausing "to make their salaams at the offices of the two companies"—those being the offices of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) and the British India Steam Navigation Company, both of which retained offices at the Royal Docks. The term 'salaam', Arabic for 'peace' سلام here implies a greeting.

The *Illustrated London News*, dated 9th April 1904, carried an article titled, "Hobson Jobson: A Curious Hindoo Celebration at Easter in the East End." This event was, in fact, a Muslim commemoration of Āshūrā at the Royal Albert Dock, not a 'Hindoo Celebration'. The phrase 'Hobson Jobson' refers to the names Hasan and Husayn, the grandsons of Prophet Muhammad, and evolved as a linguistic corruption of the call "Ya Hasan, Ya Husayn يا حسن يا حسين"

This phrase gradually morphed through variations—'Hosseen Gosseen,' 'Hossy Gossy,' 'Hossen Jossen,' and 'Jackson Backson'—

eventually becoming ‘Hobson-Jobson’.^{iv} The phrase became so commonly used that Colonel Henry Yule and Dr. A.C. Burnell adopted it as the title for their 1886 dictionary, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*. The article described the ‘lascars’ as ‘grotesquely dressed’ and carrying a ‘flimsy temple made of cardboard and paper’. It further suggested that the ‘temple’ was believed to contain the ‘devil’. However, this was an incorrect reference, as it was not a temple. In fact, it was known as *Al-Ta'ziyyah* تعزية, an Arabic term implying condolence or comfort, and a symbolic expression of grief made to represent the mausoleum of Imam Husayn (the grandson of Prophet Muhammad). Moreover, it is not associated with containing the devil.

An earlier edition of *The Graphic*, from 27th November 1873, featured a sketch of ‘lascar’ seafarers described as ‘Praying at Sunset.’ In this depiction, Muslim ‘lascars’ are shown in the *Tashahhud* تشهد performing the al-Magrib prayer *Salāt al-magrib* المغرب صلاة. Another ‘lascar’ is portrayed making supplication, or *Dua* دعاء, on the forecandle of the *Sumatra*, a vessel of the P&O.

Mahomed Gama (1895–1965)

Mahomed Gama was born in 1895 in Jhang, Old Mirpur, in the erstwhile princely state of Jammu & Kashmir. He enlisted in the Mercantile Marine in 1913, beginning his service aboard the *SS Mooltan*.

During the First World War, Mahomed Gama also served on the *SS Medina*, transporting cargo and passengers. The ship called at the ports of London and New Sydney, Australia, in February 1916, eventually arriving in Bombay (now Mumbai) on 20th November 1916.

Notably, prior to Mahomed Gama’s service, the *SS Medina* had conveyed King George V to British India for his Delhi Durbar Coronation in 1911. On 11th November 1911, King George and

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Queen Mary departed from Portsmouth aboard RMS Medina and arrived in Bombay on 2nd December 1911. The durbar took place on 12th December 1911.

Mahomed Gama arrived onboard the SS Khiva at the Royal Victoria Dock, London, in December 1917. He remained there for a month, until the first week of January 1918, while the SS Khiva was refitted for its onward journey, transporting American troops from New York to the British ports of London, Plymouth, and Liverpool

After the war ended, Mahomed Gama was awarded two medals in recognition of his service: the British War Medal and the Mercantile Marine War Medal. He passed away in August 1965 in Jhang, Old Mirpur, while visiting Pakistan. His burial site is now submerged beneath the waters of the Mangla Reservoir. His descendants continue to reside in both the United Kingdom and Pakistan.

Amir Haidar Khan (1900–1989)

Dada Amir Haidar Khan (anglicised in the crew records as Ameer Hyder Atta Mahomed) served aboard the SS Khiva alongside Mahomed Gama. In his memoir, *Chains to Lose: Life and Struggles of a Revolutionary*, he vividly describes life during the First World War at the Royal Victoria Dock. He recounts how London's streets were "kept dark," with little visible beyond the "cross-beams of powerful searchlights" that scanned the skies over the city. He wrote, "Thus London, the cornerstone of the British Empire, was a rather gloomy place to live during the winter of 1917–1918."

Reflecting on his impressions of London, he observed, "I had thought of all the white-skinned men who wore collars and suits as Sahibs, and all the women who wore skirts, blouses and awry hats as Mem Sahibs—the people of the ruling class as I knew them in India." In Urdu and Arabic, *Sahib* صاحب is a respectful title for a man, with *Sahiba* صاحبة as the equivalent for a woman, similar in

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function to the English use of “esquire.”

Amir Haidar Khan’s memoir is among the earliest recorded histories by a ‘lascar’ seafarer documenting experiences from the First World War.



Ratcliffe Walk

Derek Perry

Last year, I compiled a history walk for a friend of mine, who is the descendent of a well-known radical figure in London during the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Bradlaugh. I used notes provided by another person and realised I had a lot to learn about the process. I joined this project to gain better knowledge of how to design and present a historical walk.

It taught me how to pace my walk with a suitable number of stops, how to present information in an interesting way, and how to ensure the safety and comfort of those to whom I would be making a presentation.

We were taken to local history libraries and archives, where we researched not just the places we would visit but also looked for real human stories that would enrich our presentations. We discovered maps and directories that gave us the names and occupations of ordinary people. Newspaper reports of crimes and accidents also provided much information. For example, the compulsory purchase order for slum clearance in the original Limehouse ‘Chinatown’ showed that in one street, most of the names were of Chinese origin and included shopkeepers, restaurant owners and laundries.

During a previous project with the Brick Lane Circle, I came across a forgotten hamlet on the north bank of the River Thames known as Ratcliffe. At The London Archives in Clerkenwell, I discovered that this place had a remarkable history. It was from here that the first voyages by English adventurers were made in the sixteenth century to discover a northern route to China. I later discovered a plaque erected in 1922 to commemorate these voyages, and it became part of my walk.

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At the time, the riverbanks were mostly marsh. Ratcliffe was the nearest place to the Tower of London, where larger ships could land. But from this small beginning that the Port of London would expand until by the end of the nineteenth century, it was the greatest port in the world and the hub of the British Empire. This became my theme - Ratcliffe was the birthplace of England's maritime adventure, the cradle of its empire.

To add detail to the story, I sought out early maps, engravings and newspaper reports of Ratcliffe. I discovered the trades and traders who provided services to the ships that docked there. I learned about the characters who lived there, the sailors and the ships' captains. There were stories of the largest emporium of exotic animals in London, where sailors brought monkeys and parrots and where a tiger once escaped, to the consternation of the local people.

Ratcliffe became known as 'Sailor Town' and had a large, ever-changing population. Returning sailors required services that the taverns and brothels gladly provided, which relieved them of their

RATCLIFFE WALK

wages, often by nefarious means. This was not the only danger. In the late eighteenth century, a massive fire, which began at the East India Company warehouse, destroyed more than 400 houses in the heart of Ratcliffe.

I gathered many stories of people and events. I walked the area more than once to put those stories into context. My presentation needed much editing. I plotted a walk, timing each section with stops at suitable points where I composed a short presentation. I checked where there were toilets and where refreshments might be had. I ensured the walk ended at a pub on the riverbank dating back to 1588.

I prepared a map showing the meeting point, the endpoint and the stops in between. I presented the walk one fine late summer day to a group of my colleagues in the project and a couple of friends. I believe it went well, and I received some very positive comments.

I enjoyed the experience of researching my walk and presenting it. I look forward to presenting it again in the spring. The group is looking at how these walks might be presented. We are considering the possibility of publishing them as self-guided walks on an appropriate website or offering them as guided walks to local community organisations.



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Lost Chinatown walking tour

Kooi Chock Glendinning

I worked on developing the Lost Chinatown of London Walking Tour as I was already a trained tour guide for Chinatown in Leicester Square. I thought it would give me a head start and be quite easy. How wrong was I. I learned that the Lost Chinatown in Limehouse has its own story, and I knew everything from my research.



Besides, the Chinatown in Leicester Square tour was all curated for me, and I just had to learn the stories and work out the route. For the Lost Chinatown in Limehouse, I had to start from the beginning, researching how and why it was there, how and why it disappeared and what happened in between. I only went to Limehouse once before with my fellow tour guides from Leicester Square's Chinatown. We were privileged to be allowed into the library on Commercial Road to see the renovation. It completely transformed the place, with bedrooms designed and named after

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famous people like Moe Tze Toa.

While researching, it became personal, as I found out that it really started centuries ago in China, as early as the 1600s, when my Chinese great-grandparents, grandparents and their friends were there to suffer the tremendous effects of the British Empire's aggressive enforcement of opium. My Chinese ancestors' generations were forced to become drug addicts, and many died fighting against the British for imposing opium on them. The British Empire heartlessly sent their navies filled with British and Indian soldiers, imposing their selfish needs and barbaric dominance on the less able Chinese. They then recruited the Chinese to work on their cargo ships to transport tea and other goods back to England. It was appalling how the British Empire killed so many Chinese and destroyed and ended the dynastic reigns (2070 BC to 1912). All that was because the British wanted what China had. Tea from elsewhere was not good enough for them.



It was an impetus for me to research the subject more deeply, as they managed to make my grandparents run away from China and settle in Malaya, one of the many colonies of the British Empire. I was a Colonial Child and suffered British rule, too. After many years of fighting, the British finally gave us our independence in 1953. Rather than allow us Chinese, Malays and Indians to sort out our freedom, the British imposed and institutionalised Article 153.

LOST CHINATOWN WALKING TOUR

It chose the Malays to dominate over the Chinese and Indians. Any protest against this provision would result in prosecution.

Hence, 71 years later, we are still being openly discriminated against. Oppressed and suppressed, many of us Chinese and Indians had to and still are leaving our families behind and seeking a decent life elsewhere. Many friends and I came here in the 1960s and 1970s to study and work in nursing. Some of our parents had to sell their houses to fund their children to study abroad.

Conservative MP Robert Jenrick, on 29 October 2024, stated in the Guardian newspaper that “British former colonies should be thankful for the legacy of the Empire, and not demanding reparation”. I got even more upset about seeing his ignorance. He further said, “Countries that were part of the Empire owe us a debt of gratitude for the inheritance we left them in the form of legal and democratic institutions”. What? For them killing so many of our ancestors and enslaving a lot of them? Ethnic cleansing and driving us away from our home countries? The British are proud of that; we should thank them for that.

Perhaps he should come to one of our tours and really hear what the British Empire had done to so many countries all over the world. That they went, grabbed and killed thousands just for their own greed. They were unstoppable, taking advantage of us, poor, helpless natives.

On 12 September 2024, I attended a Zoom session on the deportation of Chinese seamen from Liverpool and London, where Chinese men and women in their seventies were still crying for their fathers, who were illegally deported through the Defence Of the Realm Act (DORA). All these workers and their families were called Aliens. It was first passed in the United Kingdom on 8 August 1914, four days after the country entered the First World War. It gave the government wide-ranging powers during the war, such as requisitioning buildings or land needed for the war effort, making regulations, creating criminal offences and excuses to eliminate Aliens. Many Chinese opium addicts who the British

created in China and brought over as cheap workers on their cargo ships were deported back to China. They were treated like criminals. Some were illegally deported. Many were plucked out of their beds, leaving their families wondering where their fathers and husbands were.

For research sources, I found some archives were more helpful than others. It was also possible to access some sources online and read at leisure from home.

The more I read, the more I wanted to know. Knowing when to stop is helpful; a deadline prevents you from going further.

We are blessed with Wikipedia and Google searches on the internet. Often, I was up in the quiet of the night searching away. Some of the information I found through them was more up-to-date than available in most archives.

Essential skills are needed to navigate the internet successfully, including knowing how to search and input data regarding documents, maps and other items you seek. There is just so much online.

Once I established the subject of my walk, preparation for the walk was crucial right from then on. Thinking about and exploring how the story could be told through the walk helped plan the route. Determination of how many stops and how much to say at each stop was important as there would be no time to go backwards.

Some stops can be very noisy during certain times, so I thought having the audience backed up against the wall could keep the noise to a minimum. Another option was to move to a quieter place. My other tour guide friends use electronic devices to project their voices, but I prefer speaking loudly and having a smaller group. I personally would keep the numbers down to about ten.

If it's cold, I plan to meet at a café or somewhere warm. I have attended one tour with thirty. It was difficult to hear what the tour guide was talking about.

I was glad to advise my daughter not to attend with her young baby as it would not be so comfortable for them and all concerned.

LOST CHINATOWN WALKING TOUR

There should also be a comfort break if the participants want it. It is also useful to know the location of the toilet or cafe for tea to plan the break in the middle of the tour. Not every café is able to cope with a big crowd, so it is worth finding a suitable one beforehand.

We must always consider wheelchairs or any other special needs.

Punctuality is always a problem as no one can predict how disruptive the transport can be. I would allow ten minutes to wait and hope the latecomers could catch up.

Health and safety are very important; always advise comfortable shoes and proper clothing for the weather. Road safety must be adhered to. An attendance list is a must, and a feedback form is always helpful.

Finally, I would like to thank Brick Lane Circle, behind the British Empire Walks project, for giving me this chance to develop my walking tour and to tell our important histories. I enjoyed several tours around East London by others in the project, and I thank the Tower Hamlet Archive and Google for the tremendous amount of information I could access from them.



BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

A connection to Heros of Empire captured in the modern day access to cinematic film and photography

Masalaman Qualam

Embankment > Trafalgar Square > Mall > Churchill Museum – Clive Statue > Parliament Square > Westminster Big Ben > London Eye > Dali Museum.

Embankment Dr Strange > Trafalgar Square Napoleon > Mall-the Queen > Churchill Museum – Clive Statue > Parliament Square Churchill / Nelson Mandela + 12 others > Westminster - Big Ben > London Eye > Dali Museum.

The square now contains 12 statues of historical political figures. Statues of George Canning, Robert Peel, Edward Smith-Stanley, Benjamin Disraeli and Viscount Henry John Palmerston were erected in the 19th century and were later joined by statues of Abraham Lincoln (1920), Jan Smuts (1956) and Winston Churchill (1973), with David Lloyd George (2007), Nelson Mandela (2007) and Mahatma Gandhi (2015) added in this century. Millicent Fawcett (2018) is the first to depict a woman and the first to be designed by a woman.

EMBANKMENT London Sanctum in Dr Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch CBE) Modern Commonwealth Association as a custodian of the British Empire. The London sanctum front door entrance is destroyed by a powerful sorcerer called Kaecilius and he and his followers, in full cult clothing are chased out the front door, to be met in the mirror dimension on the corner of Whitehall place and Northumberland avenue, where most of the followers are killed battling on the walls on Whitehall road.

British Empire Walks

The Empire connection is that Stan Lee, in his Marvel Comics super hero creations, in a fact based fiction creative comic to film adaptation declares that London is one of the three earth sanctums and sanctuaries and supernatural cultist training grounds, is housed or was housed in Whitehall Place.

The librarian looks to be of Bengal origin, as seemed kind and soft hearted, with no real fighting skills.

-Katmandoo in Nepal, north of today's Bangladesh.

-Land locked Congo, with its language named Engala (stolen from England) and it is said there is a mythical language Bengal, (stolen from the the bay of Bengal or Bangladesh.) The split was written in the nature of the first approach to books, which it is said would open in the centre fold of the book. And East and West was dictated to discover the return of these stolen heroes, the Purple tight skinned fantom from Engala and the Man who dresses like a kolor chita bag who went to cat Man do, originally a ferret child named mogli from the jungles of Bengal or Bengala.

Other heroes on route...

-Nelson's Column place on the towering pedestal, stance facing towards Whitehall, which lead to 10 Downing street and Parliament square.

-Mall and to mention the long reign of Queen Elizabeth ii now the reign handed King Charles.

-Cabinet War Rooms with the statue of Robert Clive, (or Bob Clive of India as I like to put it).

-Parliament square The square now contains 12 statues of historical political figures. Statues of George Canning, Robert Peel, Edward Smith-Stanley, Benjamin Disraeli and Viscount Henry John Palmerston were erected in the 19th century and were later joined by statues of Abraham Lincoln (1920), Jan Smuts (1956) and Winston Churchill (1973), with David Lloyd George (2007), Nelson Mandela (2007) and Mahatma Gandhi (2015) added in this century. Millicent Fawcett (2018) is the first to depict a woman and the first to be designed by a woman.

A CONNECTION TO HEROS OF EMPIRE CAPTURED IN
THE MODERN DAY ACCESS TO CINEMATIC FILM AND
PHOTOGRAPHY

- The famous icon BIG BEN.
- Westminster Bridge – 28 days later film.
- London eye – Fantastic Four.
- Salvatore Dali – famous surrealist movement in the arts scene.

British Empire Walks

Silk dyeing, Indigo imports, the East India Company and the local churches

Peter Musgrave

I am white British, now in my 70s. I had lived and worked in and around Spitalfields during some of 1970s to 1980s, and I had contacts with the local Bangladeshi community. One amazing discovery in 1985 was that places I felt drawn towards were places my ancestors had lived in, too. John Musgrave moved from Bedford in the 1730s to become an apprentice silk dyer in Spitalfields and lived in Frying Pan Alley from 1743, where he raised a family.



I went on to live and work in Bangladesh at different times from 1989 onwards (nine years in all). I found out how hard it was to develop local economies based on community self-reliance, while the Bangladesh economy became based on export-led growth of the clothing trade. In 2016, my son Ben did some research for a play called *Indigo Giant*. I discovered that places I had visited in

Bangladesh, such as Meherpur and Rajshahi, had connections to Indigo cultivation. I learnt how badly British planters had treated indigo growers.

The subject areas of my walk

1. The importation and storage of silk and indigo dyes into Spitalfields and how this fitted into the Silk Weaving Trade, while learning about silk weaving in Spitalfields.
2. How far local churches along the way of my walk in and around Bishopsgate, Spitalfields and Aldgate and down to the Thames were complicit with the East India Company (and Slavery) and how far they offered a critique
3. Entwined around all this is imagining what life was like for my ancestor, John Musgrave, a silk dyer from the 1740s in Spitalfields.

What research and other activities I carried out to develop my walk. “We make the road by walking,” walking walking and walking. By just standing and looking at places, I was able to connect to what I had learnt from the internet

I checked themes out on the internet and then tried to triangulate these insights by further research and checking places out on the ground.

Then, I followed up with new themes that emerged from the research.

I learnt how, during the 18th Century, warehouses began to be built to cater for the huge amounts of imports coming into East London through the East India Company trade and how existing housing was removed to make way for these warehouses and later on in the 19th Century for the development of Liverpool St Station.

I discovered places in Spitalfields where silk dyeing was carried out and also how close this was to where my ancestor John and his family had lived in the 18th Century. The silk weaving trade had its

SILK DYEING, INDIGO IMPORTS, THE EAST INDIA COMPANY AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES

ups and downs, especially in the 1760s, leaving many workers underemployed and in poverty. Trades like silk weaving in Spitalfields and indigo growing in Bengal had big benefits for the rich and huge costs for the poor.



I gained a lot of new information about churches in that local area and how strongly they were connected to the East India Company. I come from a strong Christian background, but I had no conscious awareness that churches along this City and East London Walk had such strong 18th-century connections with the East India Company and or with slavery. I found this quite shocking.

I found that churches such as St Botolph's without Bishopsgate, St Botolph's Aldgate, St Olave's Church, Seething Lane and All Hallows by the Tower had strong connections to the East India Company through their congregations, which included many merchants, employees and officials of the Company. Given their locations close to the heart of the City's commercial district, they attracted those involved in London's overseas trade, including the East India Company. The churchyards contain several memorials and graves of

individuals who worked for or were associated with the Company.

What I have gained by joining the project

I gained a lot by just walking around an area I thought I knew well, but I found there was so much more to learn about these places.

The British Empire Walks project in particular (and the Brick Lane Circle in general over many years) has been valuable in my growing awareness of the extent of the British Empire and the East India Company in particular and of the importance of developing a critique of it.

The story of my personal connection

The other thing that struck me most about this whole thing is the personal connection for me. I found myself living and working in Spitalfields in the 1970s out of a fascination for the Bangladeshi community of Brick Lane, active in the rag trade still going on then.

I lived there with Ruth, my wife. I found it hard doing this, and eventually, we moved away, never to live there again. But again, I came back here to work in the 1980s – again, this was hard for me. Then in 1985, I discovered that my ancestor John Musgrave had lived in Spitalfields and had got married in Limehouse Church – near where I was working at that time. So, my interest in John Musgrave, my ancestor, is also linked with my own personal history.

I always find it interesting to come back and walk around this area. One thing that struck me this time was discovering that the East India Warehouses were only three minutes from the Frying Pan Alley, where my ancestor lived, even if not built until the late 1780s. Frying Pan Alley is just a 15-minute walk from the Thames.

I am convinced that John Musgrave and his family were intimately aware and connected with the docks, the shipping and the East India trades coming in. Further, almost certainly, he would have seen and met the lascars – Indian seamen who worked for low

SILK DYEING, INDIGO IMPORTS, THE EAST INDIA COMPANY AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES

wages in these ships – and sometimes left the ships to come ashore.

Another important connection for me was what went on at the other end of the East India trade- which was basically a story of colonialism, empire and exploitation. I just want to refer to three things here: The Battle of Plassey, the famines that hit Bengal in the 1780s soon after the East India Company took control of the Bengal Economy, the Indigo trade, which was almost exported by colonialist slave traders in the West Indies to be ‘practised’ on the peasants or ‘ryots’ all over modern Bengal and where Meherpur/ Nadia is an example, of which I have actual knowledge.



How I intend to take my walk forward

I have collected a lot of images and data, much of it from the internet and some photographs I took. I will follow up on my experience of doing the trial walk in 2024 and do it again in 2025 informally to family and friends. I learnt a lot that I could write up and put into a blog or two.

BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

Tea Break at the British Empire

Ravi Savur and Kavita Savur

Tea is the world's most drunk beverage after water due to its globalisation by the British Empire. With help from my wife, Kavita, the walk I have designed explores the events that led to this. It covers the major sites in London associated with the East India Company and tea, from the time it was introduced to Britain, became a significant part of the economy, had a role in the formation of the USA, helped reduce mortality during the industrial revolution when it provided a material amount of calories, and became an integral part of British society.

Rationale

The Stepney Community Trust project that provided a fuller picture of the activities of illustrious members of the East India Company at St. Paul's Cathedral made me consider applying to create this walk. Having grown up on a tea estate in Southern India, I know and understand a reasonable amount about growing, harvesting, processing and tasting of tea and life on the estates.

Route

Participants meet outside the Royal Exchange – inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth I, who gave the East India Company its exclusive Charter in 1600 – and the Bank of England, their bankers. We speak about Britain's competitiveness in the 15th and 16th-century global maritime race and the reasons for granting the Charter. The next stop is Garraway's coffee house, where tea was first served to the public in London in the 1660s. At the time, three groups were

BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

interested in tea: those believing it offered health benefits, those importing and selling it and high society women, following the lead of their Queen, Catherine of Braganza, wife of King Charles II, who regularly enjoyed tea. We move on to the site of the Headquarters of the East India Company, where the relatively recently built Grade 1 Listed building now houses a large reinsurance firm. One of the warehouses where tea was stored is the next stop, followed by a discussion on indentured labour and slavery at the only monument to the topic in the City of London. The street and site of the building that housed the majority of the tea industry after the East India Company lost its monopoly is the penultimate stop.



The final stop of the walk is at St Katherine's Docks, the site of one of the UK Tea Industry's plaques commemorating 350 years of tea in the UK. It was also the finish line for the famous Tea Clipper race of 1867 that widely captured the imagination of the British public because the recently installed telegraph provided numerous updates on the location of the five ships participating in the race.

TEA BREAK AT THE BRITISH EMPIRE



Research

The linchpin to our walk was what we learnt from Dr Georgie Wemyss when she took us on her walk around East India Dock. The subsequent presentation by Manasi Pophale and her inputs after she joined our walk were also useful.

Key takeaways

We have attempted to stay with Georgie's suggestions of:

- a. Seven of eight stops, each lasting seven or eight minutes, with the remaining time travelling between stops
- b. Position the audience with a wall or other structure behind them and then face them while speaking to ensure everyone can hear clearly.

We will try Manasi's suggestion of walking at the pace of the slowest participant at our next walk. We also benefitted from joining the informative and excellent walks arranged by others within the British Empire Walks project participants.

Other information we gathered includes that from:

1. The Horniman Museum which had an eponymous exhibition titled 茶, 차, Tea, and whose curator Navjot Mangat took us on a 'personalised tour' and then directed us to the tea tasting of "the living tea of Guizhou" (www.grasspeopletree.com)
2. The ten-episode podcast by Sathnam Sanghera called Empire of Tea
3. The Tea History Collection at Banbury in Oxfordshire, whose curator Aurora Prehm is based at the Kew Gardens
4. The London Walks
5. A discussion with Alan Chaytor, who owned Hellabode Tea Estate, producer of the highest priced tea sold at the final 1998 London auction (bought by Taylors of Harrogate for £555 per kilo with proceeds to charity) and whose father worked in Williamson Magor, Calcutta (now Kolkatta).

Reading

The London Archives provided useful maps of London and historical photos of buildings, as well as a collection of photos and press articles donated by Margaret Irving that describe her amazing story. Employed in 1922 as a Secretary at Brash Bros Tea on thirty

TEA BREAK AT THE BRITISH EMPIRE

shillings a week, she once

sampled various types of tea after the official (all-male) tea-tasting team had finished. When she gave the team leader her ranking, and he checked, finding to his surprise that her view was better than

the team's, she was given a job as the first-ever female tea taster. It multiplied her wages by over thirteen times to get twenty pounds a week. She continued as a tea taster until 1936.

The British Library (the East India Company's official archives) provided vast reading material on the topic. Noteworthy were:

1. The Early History of Coffee Houses in England, by Edward Forbes Robinson, published 1893;
2. Defence of the Patriots: the Boston Tea Party, by Benjamin Carp;
3. A Journey to the Tea Countries of China, by Robert Fortune, a Scottish botanist who, in 1848, was hired by the East India Company to steal and smuggle 30,000 tea plants from China to India;
4. An European Tea 'garden' and an Indian 'frontier': The Discovery of Assam, by Jayeeta Sharma, details the discovery of tea plants growing naturally in Assam, India;
5. India-East India Company Indentured Labour: a brief history, by Leela Gujadhhar Sarup;
6. The Story of the British Empire for children, by Francis M. Anderson, published in 1904 and updated in 1910, a book inspired by his own description of the Empire to his son. Unusual for its time, a reader today is likely to describe it as woke.
7. The Hungry Empire: how Britain's quest for food shaped the modern world, by Elizabeth M Collingham. According to her, ten to fifteen per cent of the calories of workers during the Industrial Revolution were from a "hot meal" consisting of shop-bought bread and very sweet tea.
8. Empire of Tea, by Markman Ellis, Richard Coulton and

BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

Matthew Manger provides a wealth of information and background on both tea and the Empire over the centuries.

Rehearsal

We began our practice walks with family, followed by with our peers preparing their own Empire- related walks. Based on feedback and experience, we reduced the number of stops from 8 to 7, ending by the river in St Katharine's Dock. We have since tested the walk twice with small groups of friends. One of these was on a weekday, when we realised that the bustling City means this is not optimal.

Rollout

There are no plans to commercialise the walk; instead, it will mostly be conducted for charity or education. For instance, we might donate to a charity, "A 2-hour Guided Walk on Tea Break at the British Empire for up to 10 people on a weekend in the City", that they can auction to supporters, keeping proceeds for themselves.

Lascars of Spitalfields

Rifat Wabhab

I joined this project to create a walk on lascars, and I focused on lascars who came from (now) Bangladesh. The project was an opportunity to learn about their history. This and so many other histories from Bangladesh and South Asia were not taught at school. Yet, the contributions of communities such as the lascars were central to the building of the British Empire as well as British society. Given the large presence of South Asians in England, I feel that teaching this history is now overdue. Both Bangladeshis and non-Bangladeshis would gain much from learning about the history of lascars and how they helped build Britain.



The Brick Lane Circle planned a very well-thought-out programme on how participants could complete the project. We were offered talks and guides on undertaking historical walks. The

part I enjoyed most was visits to archives and what they could offer.

I spent a large part of the project's time in The London Archives and Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, reading documents on Bangladeshi (then Indian, later East Pakistani) lascars in Britain. I found the staff of Tower Hamlets Archives to be particularly helpful in identifying suitable documents; they showed a personal commitment to my work.

Following my research, I started the exercise by identifying a suitable walking route for participants to take to understand how lascars lived, travelled and worked in the East End of London. Lascars lived in large parts of East London, from Ratcliffe to Spitalfields. To cover the whole area would have been too long a walk - especially for those not used to walking long distances. I therefore limited the walk to the Commercial Road area.

Having attended a previous walk on lascars, I was aware that the leader of the walk sometimes could not be heard because of the noise of aeroplanes taking off from City Airport. Learning from this, I chose to spend the first part of my talk in a meeting room where I would not be competing with the noise of planes or heavy traffic. My talk covered the history of lascars in the East End of London.

Seven people attended my walk. I asked for feedback, and several of the participants said it was disappointing not to have real buildings to show where lascars lived. We all agreed that it was a huge disappointment that buildings used by lascars were not marked; newer buildings have replaced many without a sign to show their former use. This shows a prejudice or judgement against the lascars. London has so many blue plaques and other commemorative signs marking the impact people have made in England, it is disappointing that lascars are not recognised or commemorated.

Given the legacy of lascars and their contribution to the building of the British Empire (as well as their contribution to the two World Wars), the Government should mark their former homes and meeting places as a way of acknowledging and valuing their

contribution. Towards the end of the journey, I was fortunate enough to locate two buildings still standing and used by a former lascar, Master Ayub Ali, to support and house lascars. Ayub Ali was previously a lascar but later became a successful businessman. He used his wealth to buy two houses: one building was used to house lascars in search of accommodation, and the other was a coffee house offering welfare advice. We all felt very happy that these two buildings were still standing. Private businesses currently own them; the Sandys Row building has a purple plaque to commemorate Master Ayub Ali and his service to the Lascars. We all feel strongly that these two buildings should receive a Blue Plaque, and a few of us are now thinking of approaching English Heritage to make this happen.

To conserve the environment and reduce the harmful effects of environmental damage, I employed the following methods:

- I used public transport to reach and leave destinations
- I walked for most of this project for my planned walk as well as the planned walk for my colleagues
- Our lunches and coffees came from local businesses
- The public archives are a great legacy to readers who can use them for free.
- Many of the paths chosen for the walks were away from busy roads and high pollution.

Finally, this was a well-managed and well-thought-out project, and I believe that all the participants enjoyed and learnt a lot. I am grateful for the thought and attention put into this project by the Project Co-Ordinator

BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS



The Bengali East End

Sabiya Khatun

Taking part in this project has been a very enriching experience. The process of research and collaboration has opened up my eyes to the many layers of history that surround us and shape us.

When I first heard about the project, I was keen to create a guided walk linked to my own personal history as a second-generation British Bangladeshi. It was very difficult, however, to narrow down the topic I would like to cover. Every street has so much to say, and you hear the lives of the people who lived here loudly echo as you walk past.

After much reflection, I came to the decision to create a guided walk that presented a general history of the presence of Bengali people in the East End. I thought it would be better to do it this way as people who attend the walk may not have previous knowledge of the early Bengali settlers, so providing a general history would ensure that participants gain a good overview of the Bengali East End and its links and roots to the British Empire.

The process of research has been very enjoyable but also quite overwhelming. The history of Bangladesh and the experience of the early settlers is so rich, but it is also, at times, quite traumatic. When I discovered new information about the degrading and shocking experiences our ancestors faced, it was quite difficult to process, for example, the Bengal Famine of 1943 and the Bengali Squatters of the 1970s. As a result, although putting together this guided walk has not been quick or easy, it has been very rewarding.

Although delving into our past can stir up negative feelings, I feel it is up to us to ensure that these important parts of history are not forgotten. Rather, they need to be presented in a clear way so

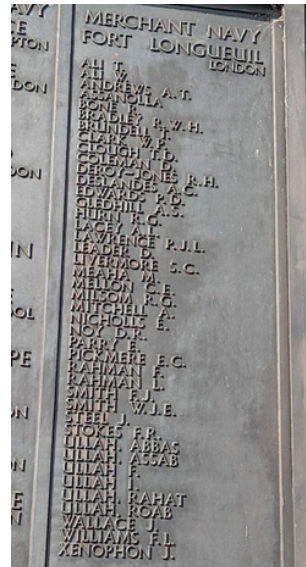
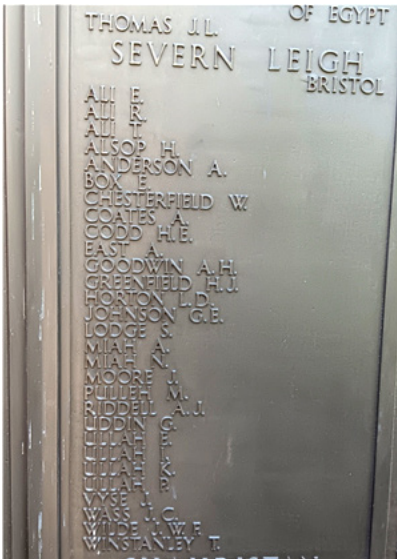
BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

that more people are aware of it. Our history needs to be bought out of the shadows and into the light.

During my research, I came across the history of the Bengali naval contribution to the First and Second World Wars. I visited the Tower Hill Merchant Sea Memorial, which was a poignant experience. I looked at the names of Bengali seamen who were part of the British War effort. Many of the names echoed those of my family members, and it made me think of my own family history and how it may be entwined with those I saw before me. The memorial also made me aware of the fact that the names engraved are the lucky ones – there may be many more thousands of Bengali seamen who remain nameless, with lives and stories erased and forgotten.

After participating in this project, I am keen to share this early Bengali history with others as I feel it is so important for people to know. I also feel a duty to the early settlers, who no longer have a voice, a face, or, in many cases, a name. This has now become the aim of my guided walk: to speak for those who came before and to share their inspiring stories.

Bengali names at Tower Hill Merchant Sea Memorial.



British Empire Walk in the City of London

Taryn Khanam

The inspiration for my walk came from accidentally passing a narrow passageway called Bengal Court while heading to my office near the Bank of England and The Royal Exchange.

This encounter sparked my curiosity about the British Empire, particularly its connections to Bengal trade and tea, especially since Fortnum & Mason is located at the Royal Exchange. I thought the opportunity to participate in the British Empire Walk Project would allow me to learn how to research the City of London's links to the British Empire, uncover people who had links to the area and trade and examine historical maps, buildings and street names.



Another reason for my interest in participating in the project was that my family was from Assam, India, famous for its tea. My grandmother loved tea, having grown up in the region. My grandfather was a doctor, and several relatives worked on tea estates in Bengal, including the British-owned Kalline Tea Estate. The Bengal region has a rich history tied to British colonialism, particularly concerning the British Empire and tea plantations. During that period, there was a significant presence of British people living in Bengal, a region with a history tied to British colonialism, especially regarding tea plantations. My grandmother's fondness for tea, which she passed on to me, reflects her roots in this region.

My walk traces the historical links in the City of London to the Bengal trade that brought the Bengal province and its enormous wealth under British control and traces the history of the Bengali community in London's East End. Having worked in the City for over six years, I see massive changes due to development and transformation, and old and original buildings are disappearing fast. The visible signs of history will be lost. The East India Company has almost no landmarks left to discover in London; many of them have simply been torn down, and new buildings built in their place, which will make it difficult to visualise the history linked to the British Empire.

The themes I weave into my narrative include the economic ties to Bengal and a sense of belonging as a Bangladeshi, creating a rich tapestry of history. Researching the economic ties to Bengal uncovers the deep-rooted connections and historical trade routes that have shaped London's economic landscape. Additionally, it demonstrates how these ties have facilitated social and cultural exchanges, leading to a shared heritage. For instance, the historical trade between Bengal and London has influenced cuisine, textiles, and language.

Bengali presence in London dates back over 400 years. The City of London is a short walk from the hub of the Bengali community,

BRITISH EMPIRE WALK IN THE CITY OF LONDON

known as Brick Lane's 'Bangla Town'. The legacy of the British Empire and its connection to Bengal is still evident in Brick Lane today, with its vibrant curry houses and cultural landmarks. The area's history reflects the broader story of colonialism, migration, and cultural exchange.

The City of London, referred to as "the City", was the heart of the British Empire's operations. It was crucial for trade, banking and governance that fuelled the empire's expansion and supported its vast network of colonies. My walk begins at the Royal Exchange, which played a key role in London's commercial history. Founded in 1565 by Sir Thomas Gresham (a Street named after him is nearby) and opened by Queen Elizabeth I in 1571, it provided a central hub for merchants. Gresham's work paved the way for large-scale trading ventures like the East India Company. My walk explores the darker aspects of British history by visiting locations connected to colonialism and slavery. This walking tour takes us through sites significant to the British Empire, including the headquarters of the East India Company. The guided walk reveals intriguing alleyways and historical buildings throughout the City, intertwining them with stories and events from the empire's past. I express the sadness of not being able to identify the actual names of the people buried in graveyards listed as originating from Bengal, which adds a poignant human element to the narrative.

Both ayahs and sailors played significant roles in the British Empire. The earliest settlers were sailors known as 'lascars' who worked on British naval and merchant ships in harsh and dangerous conditions, and ayahs were employed as nannies or nursemaids by British families during long sea voyages to Britain. During the walk, I share the stories of lascars and ayahs, honouring their struggles and legacies. We visit Jewry Street, the location of the Ayahs' Home near Tower Hill linked to the maritime history of London, and recount the tales of these brave pioneers while passing sites that commemorate their contributions. Walking through the area, we can imagine the stories of lascars and ayahs who may have crossed

these very streets. Tower Hill has the Tower Hill Memorial, which honours merchant seafarers, including a few Bengali sailors.

Historical trade routes and connections are reflected in the names and locations of streets. For example, my walking tour, which stops at Lime Street in the City of London, had ties to the East India Company and imported limestone from Bengal. The East India Company's headquarters was located on Leadenhall Street, very close to Lime Street.

I discovered a fascinating historical connection between my father's homeland district, Bhalogonj, and the East India Company. Located in north-eastern Bangladesh, Companyganj is known for the Bholaganj stone quarry. The East India Company was involved in the lime trade in the Fenchuganj, Sumangunj and Bhalogonj areas of Sylhet, Bengal. It exported limestone to the UK for building docks and buildings in London.

In the 19th century, the East India Company played a major role in the limestone trade, particularly from Sylhet, Bangladesh. Many British businessmen, like Robert Lindsay, a collector for the company from 1778 to 1787, made their fortunes in this business. The company held a monopoly on trade with India until 1813, and Lindsay's autobiography offers insights into this limestone trade.

The archives at the British Library have records of Robert Lindsey's transactions and the lime trade in Bengal. The library has ship journals from the East India Company that detail the transport of limestone and other goods from Bengal to the UK. Several ships, including the Lady Jane Dundas, were part of the company's fleet engaged in trade between Bengal and Britain.

Participating in the British Empire Heritage Guide programme has been an invaluable experience, particularly in creating a tour pack centred on my area of focus. Overall, it has been a rewarding programme. The training workshops and visits to archive libraries provided excellent resources for accessing research information and maps. In the practical sessions, we learned how to plan the walk, develop a map with designated stops, create an engaging narrative

BRITISH EMPIRE WALK IN THE CITY OF LONDON

and on route development. Although the role-playing session was nerve-wracking, it was essential for gathering feedback from the programme participants. This feedback helped me consider the planning of the walking tour stops and three interesting points about each visiting location. Some highlights of the programme included a walking tour led by Dr Georgie Wemyss, which focused on the East India Dock Company, and another walk by David Rosenberg that explored the suffragettes and enemies of the Empire. An online session with Manasi Pophale also provided valuable tips and tricks for conducting a British Empire walking tour.

After completing the British Empire Walk Project, I will consider leading walks in the future to share what I have learned from my perspective as a person of Bengali heritage. I will continue researching and seeking new viewpoints on this topic, as understanding our historical connections to Britain is incredibly important. My walk highlights the contributions of Bengali sailors, ayahs and traders to the development of London. This walk is ideal for local communities, city workers, students, tourists and members of the Bengali community who are interested in their heritage.

I look forward to sharing my knowledge with others in the future.



BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

About Brick Lane Circle (BLC)

Who we are?

We are a voluntary community organisation developed from discussions in cafes and restaurants in and around Brick Lane in the 1990s. It was formally set up in 2006 to help:

Transform the intellectual landscape of the Bangladeshis in the UK and take the community to a new level of confidence and critical engagement with everything relevant to the community's progress and development

Discover and promote the shared common roots of Britain's diverse population through research, knowledge sharing and learning about each other's history, country of origin and experiences in the UK

We organise seminars, exhibitions and events to achieve our objectives and develop and deliver innovative projects and initiatives.

Aims and objectives

Organise seminars, exhibitions, events and activities in the UK to encourage and facilitate research and knowledge generation/dissemination concerning Bangladesh and Bangladeshis abroad.

Consider, learn lessons and explore the potential of the long historical links between Bangladesh and Britain.

Explore and develop innovative ways of promoting better understanding between the UK Bangladeshi community and the wider diverse multi-faith / multi-cultural communities in Britain

Encourage and facilitate better connections between Bangladesh and the UK concerning education, economics, social, culture and tourism

Engage young people in the UK from diverse backgrounds and generate interest among them to learn more about Bangladesh and Bangladeshis abroad and undertake innovative and exciting projects/activities for mutual benefits

Help develop deeper and shared common roots among the UK's

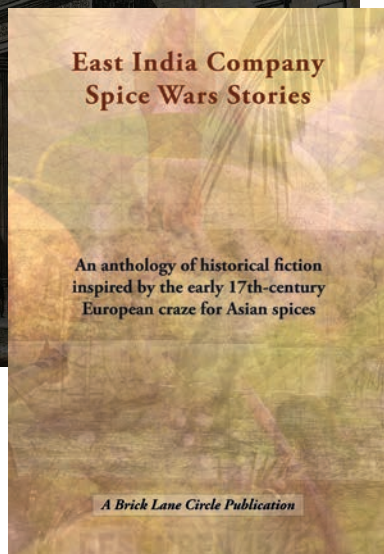
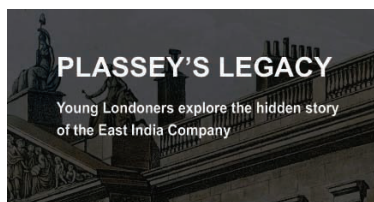
BRITISH EMPIRE WALKS

diverse population through research, knowledge sharing and learning about each other's history, country of origin and experiences in the UK

Over the years, our main focus has been history, mainly concerning Bengal, the East India Company and Bangladeshis in Britain.

From 2010 to 2021, we ran an annual Bengal History Week programme and several conferences and events on history. We also developed and delivered several projects on the East India Company and community cohesion, funded by The National Lotteries Heritage Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund. Examples of Brick Lane Circle projects funded by The National Lotteries Heritage Fund are provided below.

The British Empire Walks project is the last initiative of Brick Lane Circle. We will be closing our organisation and would like to thank everyone who supported us and attended our events to make them successful.



Brick Lane Circle: www.bricklanecircle.org.

The Brave Jahazis
Ahmed Choudhury

**The 'Strangers' Home Unearthing Invisible Seafaring
Histories of Empire**
Asif Shakoor

Ratcliff Walk
Derek Perry

Lost Chinatown walking tour
Kooi Chock Glendinning

**A connection to Heros of Empire captured in the
modern day access to cinematic film and photography**
Masalaman Qualam

**Silk dyeing, Indigo imports, the East India Company
and the local churches**
Peter Musgrave

Tea Break at the British Empire
Ravi Savur and Kavita Savur

Lascars of Spitalfields
Rifat Wahhab

The Bengali East End
Sabiya Khatun

British Empire Walk in the City of London
Taryn Khanam