

**A self-guided walk around
The Royal London Hospital Estate in Whitechapel**

The Survey of London

Photographs © Derek Kendall for the Survey of London



The Royal London Hospital

The Royal London Hospital traces its origins to a charitable infirmary established in 1740 for the working poor of east London. Initially based in converted terraced houses in Moorgate and Whitechapel, the hospital secured a permanent home with the construction of a purpose-built hospital (1751–1778) in open fields on the south side of Whitechapel Road. The building was raised to designs by Boulton Mainwaring, the hospital's surveyor, in close collaboration with its medical staff and governors.

In the nineteenth century, the hospital was altered drastically as extensions were built to improve conditions. The Alexandra Wing (west) opened in 1866 and the Grocers' Wing (east and donated by the Grocers' Company) was opened by Queen Victoria in 1876; both were designed by Charles Barry Jr. Further extensions were overseen by Rowland Plumbe, the hospital's surveyor, in the years around 1900.

In 2012 the Royal London Hospital transferred to a new building designed by HOK. There are plans to convert its former premises into a new civic centre for Tower Hamlets Council.



Panoramic view of the north front of the former Royal London Hospital in 2016.

The Royal London Hospital Estate

The Royal London Hospital has defined a large area in Whitechapel and Mile End Old Town. When the hospital opened in Whitechapel Road in 1757, it enjoyed an airy location bounded to the south by open fields and to the east by Whitechapel Mount.

In the eighteenth century, fields stretching as far south as Commercial Road were acquired by the hospital to protect its vicinity from nuisances and preserve the quality of its air. Its estate may be defined broadly as the area bounded by Whitechapel Road north, Commercial Road south, Cavell Street east, and Settles Street west.

From the late 1780s the hospital started to develop its estate to raise funds. The earliest development took place on the west side of New Road, with houses built to a street plan and elevation devised by the hospital's surveyor, John Robinson. The hospital's land on the east side of the New Road was developed in stages from the early nineteenth century. The laying out of the streets was carried out with an eye to preserving ventilation around the hospital, guided by the institution's House Committee and informed by its medical staff.



Walden Street, photographed in 2016.



Philpot Street, photographed in 2016.

Mount Terrace

Mount Terrace owes its name to Whitechapel Mount, an artificial hill formed as part of the fortifications built round London in the 1640s. A row of thirteen plain brick houses survives as the last mark of the City Corporation's more extensive development of the site in 1806–7. Known as Mount Street until 1939, the road now called Mount Terrace was developed on both sides with two rows of seventeen houses.

The development has a hectic planning history owing to the watchful guard over the hospital's vicinity kept by its House Committee. As the medical staff desired the hospital to be 'as open and free to the air as possible', the prospect of nearby building development was received with trepidation. The City initially agreed to adopt a plan for two parallel rows of houses set 'at a wide interval for gardens', yet this was supplanted by a much denser plan devised by George Dance the Younger, the City Surveyor.

The hospital's opposition to the later scheme subsided after the City agreed to alter its plan with the formation of Turner Street, a public thoroughfare that cut between the houses and the west end of the hospital. This plan preserved ventilation and improved access to the hospital's as yet undeveloped estate to the south.

The south side of Mount Terrace was cleared in 1919 after the site was acquired by the London Hospital for redevelopment, and its north side was shortened at its east end *c.*1960–70s to make way for the rebuilding of the hospital's Alexandra Wing. The surviving houses bear City insurance plaques on their façades.



22–34 Mount Terrace, photographed in 2016.



City insurance plaque, Mount Terrace.

The former Dental Institute and Students' Union, Stepney Way

The former Dental Institute and Students' Union was built in 1962–5 to designs by Stephen Statham & Associates, a little-known architectural practice. This assertive block was the outcome of an ambitious plan to unite and extend the hospital's dental treatment, education and research facilities. Between 1945 and 1952, the dental department and its associated school tripled in size. This substantial block south of the Outpatients Department was designed to accommodate 130,000 dental patients each year and to permit a doubling of the annual admission of dentistry students to 50. A large and highly specialized Dental Institute was accompanied by a separate Students' Union at the east end of the building. The Dental Institute has fallen into disuse, yet the adjoining Students' Union continues as Barts and the London Students' Association.

After its completion in 1965, the institute was described triumphantly as 'the manifestation of a philosophy of dental treatment and education translated into practical building terms'. The internal configuration of the Dental Institute was highly specialized thanks to collaboration between the architects and building committee. The arrangement of the first floor was a focus for the architects and the building committee, who studiously tested models and prototypes. The result was a central core comprising a sterilising department, a waiting area, surgeries and offices, partially encircled by a treatment area containing 92 dental chairs for patients. These were arranged in four-bay clusters separated by low screens to ensure privacy. The narrow upper floors of the five-storey tower were largely assigned to dental education and research.



The former Dental Institute and Students' Union, photographed in 2016.

The London Hospital Medical College, Turner Street

The Royal London Hospital has been associated with teaching since the early 1740s, when physicians and surgeons were permitted to take fee-paying pupils, along with dressing pupils, who paid an additional fee to dress wounds. The first lectures at the hospital took place in 1749 at the instigation of its founding surgeon, John Harrison. By 1781, a course of lectures on anatomy and surgery had been established. The provision of a purpose-built lecture theatre in 1783–5 was to expand teaching at the London Hospital and elevate its status to that of a medical school. The institution that later became the London Hospital Medical College, then part of the University of London in 1900 before it was assimilated into Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry (Queen Mary University of London) in 1995, was first based in a purpose-built school east of the front block, on a site now occupied by the Grocers' Company's Wing.

Since 1854 the London Hospital Medical College has been based at its present site on the north-east corner of the junction of Turner Street and Stepney Way (formerly known as Oxford Street). The building has undergone successive alterations spurred by a rising volume of students and the need to modernise teaching facilities. Its principal elevation facing Turner Street belongs to the extensive remodelling of the college in 1886–7, which was carried out to designs by Rowland Plumbe. Now named in recognition of the esteemed physician Sir Archibald Garrod, the building continues in educational use as part of Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry.



Main staircase in the medical college.



The former anatomical museum, now used as a staff room.

The Good Samaritan Public House, Turner Street

The Good Samaritan Public House probably owes its name to the London Hospital, which incorporated a representation of the City of London as a Good Samaritan on its official seal of 1757. The present building lies on the corner site of 85–87 Turner Street, first developed in 1807–11. The earliest record of the Good Samaritan dates to 1827. It is plausible that the pub was rebuilt in the mid-1840s, when its first occurrence in the directories coincided with the installation of a new shop front. By the time Truman, Hanbury, Buxton & Co. leased the Good Samaritan in 1906, it was an unassuming pub comprising a three-storey front with a corner entrance and a two-storey rear range.

The Good Samaritan was rebuilt in 1937–8 by G. Barker to designs by A. E. Sewell, chief architect to Trumans. The Brick Lane brewers had initially leased only 87 Turner Street and acquired the adjacent dwelling in 1936. In the preceding year Trumans had recorded that the pub was in need of repair, yet much used by students of the London Hospital. Its reconstruction on an extended footprint was completed by August 1938, when it was assessed by the brewery's surveyors as a 'nice small house, well done'.

In line with the improving principles behind reformed pubs, the public rooms originally included a saloon bar, a sitting room, and a club room accessed by separate street entrances. Despite numerous refurbishments, stained-glass windows are preserved in the ground-floor public bar, screening a small back yard. The Good Samaritan has also retained its popularity amongst those connected with the London Hospital and its medical college. This continuing association is commemorated by characterful street signs decorated with busts of white-coated doctors.



View of the Good Samaritan Public House from Turner Street.

Gwynne House, Turner Street

Gwynne House was built in 1937–8 to designs by H. Victor Kerr, the architect of a number of interwar buildings in east London, including Commerce and Industry House in Middlesex Street (demolished), 67–75 and 101 New Road, 9–17 Turner Street and 47 Turner Street (demolished). Kerr practised as an architect during the interlude in his military career between the world wars, in which he ascended to the rank of Major (Hon. Lt. Col.). Of his surviving works in Whitechapel, Gwynne House is the most assertive expression of the Modernist style. It bears a resemblance to Wells Coates's Isokon Building, which set a precedent in style, configuration, and the provision of 'minimum' flats intended for professionals.

Gwynne House provided twenty modern flats that were designed to attract students, social workers and professional people in east London. An additional rooftop flat was allocated to a caretaker. The elegant 'tower feature' encased an electric lift, a staircase, and numerous utilities. Gwynne House was quickly identified by the hospital as a convenient base for medical practitioners, nurses and students, though rents were judged to be high. By the 1980s it had been acquired for the hospital as rented accommodation for staff from all departments.

Barts and the London Charity sold the block to a private developer in 2011. The exterior has seen minimal alterations, aside from the replacement of the original Crittall windows and the recent insertion of jaunty porthole doors. The original metal fence at the front of the block survives, characterised by sinuous lines echoing the projection of the tower. A narrow rear garden shelters a sycamore tree, a lime tree, and an 'ancient' mulberry tree.



View of Gwynne House from the south-west.

Whitechapel Library (formerly the Church of St Philip with St Augustine), Newark Street

The red-brick church that lies behind the former Royal London Hospital was built in 1888–92 to the designs of Arthur Cawston. It is on the site of a chapel raised in 1818–21 and subsequently dedicated to St Philip. Almost islanded by Stepney Way, Turner Street, and Newark Street, Cawston’s church is a commanding landmark despite the abrupt base of its unbuilt tower. The quality of his work culminates in the rich interior spaces of St Philip’s, deemed to be an ‘architectural masterpiece’ by the Gothic revivalist Stephen Dykes Bower. St Philip’s was merged with nearby St Augustine’s after the Second World War and declared redundant in 1979. The church was converted into a medical and dental library for the London Hospital Medical College in 1985–8 to plans by Fenner & Sibley. Following the assimilation of the college into Queen Mary University of London in 1995, the building continues in use as a medical and dental library.

The East London Centre Synagogue, Nelson Street

The East London Synagogue was built c.1923 by J. E. Whiter to designs by Lewis Solomon & Son. Solomon was also the architect of the Jews’ Temporary Shelter at 63 Mansell Street, c.1930. After restoration of the building in 1975, it continues in use as a synagogue.



The east end of St Philip’s Church, Stepney Way.

Yvonne Carter Building, Ashfield Street

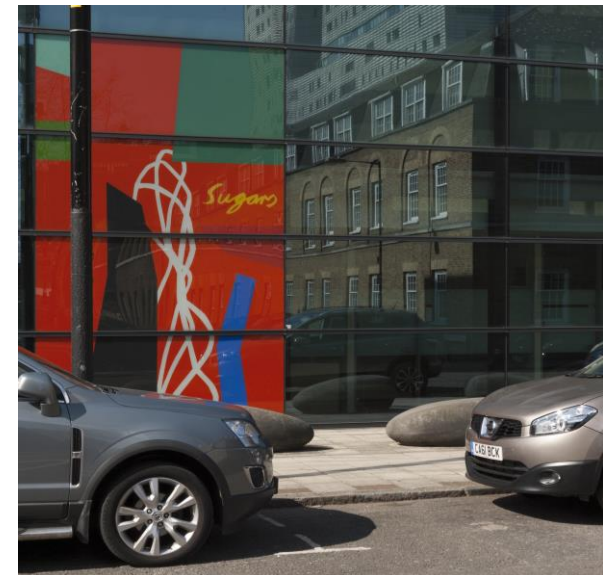
The Yvonne Carter Building was built in 1975–7 to provide laboratories for the London Hospital’s Department of Medical Microbiology and the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council. The proportions and appearance of the building are in character with the eastern portion of the London Hospital Estate, which was laid out in the nineteenth century with modest brick-built terraced houses. Behind its unassuming façade, the building contained 8,000 square feet of laboratories devoted to diagnostic work, teaching and research.



Yvonne Carter Building, Ashfield Street.

Blizard Building, Turner Street

The Blizard Building was built in 2003–5 by AMEC to designs by Will Alsop. Its name commemorates Sir William Blizard, the eminent surgeon who founded the London Hospital’s first medical college in c.1785. At its completion in 2005, this sleek glass-fronted block secured teaching and research facilities for the School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University. The building also provides a base for the Centre of the Cell, a science education centre for children. The colourful art scheme which adorns the glass walls of the building was designed by the artist Professor Bruce McLean, and incorporates words selected by Professor Mike Curtin and Professor Fran Balkwill.



The Blizard Building, Turner Street.

Philpot Street

Plans for the formation of Philpot Street were initiated by the London Hospital in 1818. This wide, airy thoroughfare stretching north-south from Newark Street to Commercial Road was first known as St Vincent Street to commemorate the Earl St Vincent, a vice-president and generous donor of the London Hospital. Between 1820 and 1845 the street was gradually developed with large brick-built terraced houses adorned by round-arched windows.

A row of terraced houses on the east side of Philpot Street were sacrificed in the 1930s for a students' hostel for the London Hospital Medical College, built by L. & W. Whitehead to designs by Edward Maufe. The tablet above the ground-floor loggia, which bears the arms of the medical college, was carved by the sculptor Vernon Hill.

The Princess Alexandra School of Nursing and John Harrison House were constructed in the 1960s to designs by T. P. Bennett & Son. The School of Nursing possesses a distinctive curved projection which contains a circular lecture theatre. John Harrison House was built as a hall of residence for staff and students of the London Hospital, and included 240 bedrooms.

John Harrison House occupies the site of the Wycliffe Chapel, a congregational church built in c.1831. The chapel became the Philpot Street Great Synagogue in 1908 and closed c.1957, its congregation merging with the Nelson Street Synagogue. The building was demolished c.1967 and John Harrison House built on the site soon after. The church had a large graveyard to its north and east sides, long disused and then occupied by tennis courts after John Harrison House was built.



Wycliffe Chapel, later Philpot Street Great Synagogue, photographed c.1905.

The new Royal London Hospital

In 2012 the Royal London Hospital transferred to a seventeen-storey purpose-built block located behind its historic base in Whitechapel Road. This modern block designed by HOK contains twenty-six operating theatres and a helipad that serves as the base of the London Air Ambulance. At its completion in 2012, the hospital was estimated to contain nearly 750 inpatient beds.

A new civic centre for Tower Hamlets Council

The former Royal London Hospital is set to be converted into a new civic centre for Tower Hamlets Council. These plans form part of the 'Whitechapel Vision', a regeneration project which includes the opening of Crossrail at Whitechapel Station in 2018. The Council plans to meet the majority of the £105m projected cost of the conversion by selling disused council buildings. Allford Hall Monaghan Morris have been engaged as architects for the conversion of the former hospital, and their plans are set to be released for public consultation soon. The building is Grade II listed. It is intended that the new civic centre will open in 2022.



The new Royal London Hospital, photographed in 2016 from Cavell Street.



The former Royal London Hospital, set to be converted into a new civic centre for Tower Hamlets Council.

East London Mail Centre, Whitechapel Road

The large concrete building which dominates the corner of Whitechapel Road and Cavell Street represents the last expression of postal activity on an extensive site which was once the centre of the Post Office's operations in the East End. Before its closure in 2012, the East London Mail Centre (formerly known as the Eastern District Post Office) processed mail for the entire 'E' postal district, an area covering over 50 square miles from Chingford to Poplar, and was the eastern terminus of the Post Office Railway.

The present Modernist building was constructed in two phases by 1970. The first comprised the eight-storey west block, which housed a ground-floor public post office with administrative offices above. It was followed by the adjoining four-storey sorting office, which extends along Cavell Street to Raven Row. The drab utilitarian exterior was the product of a short-lived initiative to standardise the design of post office buildings, in a new house style showcased in a 1960s exhibition produced by the architects' department of the Ministry of Public Building and Works, headed by Eric Bedford.

The interior of the sorting office was laid out for a mechanised workflow, which processed four million items each week. The Eastern District relied on over 2,000 postal staff working through the day and night, and a lounge, a games room, and a bar were provided on the fourth floor. The East London Mail Centre did not survive plans announced in 2000 to modernise London's sorting system and, at the time of writing (2016), its former offices are occupied by tenants and only a modest delivery desk continues to operate. As the site has been earmarked for redevelopment by Tower Hamlets Council, the building is likely to be demolished.



View of the East London Mail Centre from the south-east in 2016.

The Survey of London

The Survey of London provides essential reading for anyone wishing to find out about the capital's built environment. It is the leading reference work on the history of London and its buildings, internationally acknowledged for its authority and accessibility. Founded in 1894 by the Arts and Crafts architect C. R. Ashbee as a small volunteer project, and initiated with studies of parts of East London, the Survey has evolved into a detailed area-by-area chronicle of urban development, encompassing buildings of all types and periods.

Since Ashbee's day the work of the Survey has been carried on under a succession of public bodies leading to the publication of 50 parish volumes and 18 monographs exploring the histories of a wide variety of London districts and monuments. In 2013 the Survey of London became part of the Bartlett School of Architecture in University College London, from where it continues its detailed architectural and topographical research.



Fieldwork underway at Whitechapel Library (formerly the Church of St Philip with St Augustine) in August 2017.

About the 'Histories of Whitechapel' Project

Whitechapel is the inner fulcrum of London's East End, a district with a long and rich history, currently in the throes of intense change. In an exciting departure and a return to the Survey's founding ethos that has been made possible by a major grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (reference AH/N00146X/1) and the involvement of the Bartlett Faculty's Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, the Survey's exploration of Whitechapel's history is being rooted in this collaborative map-based website.

It is designed to involve the public (you) in compiling information about the area's sites, to accommodate many voices for many histories. The aim is to bring together individual stories and knowledge about housing, commerce, religion and entertainment, wealth and poverty, dissent, reform and conflict, and more besides. Immigration is a primary historical fact in Whitechapel's history, embracing over centuries German, Irish, East European, Jewish and Bengali Muslim settlements, among others. We warmly invite you to explore the website and to make your own contributions.

<https://surveyoflondon.org>

