

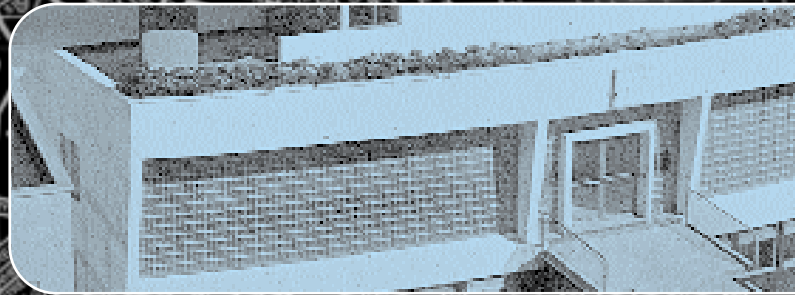
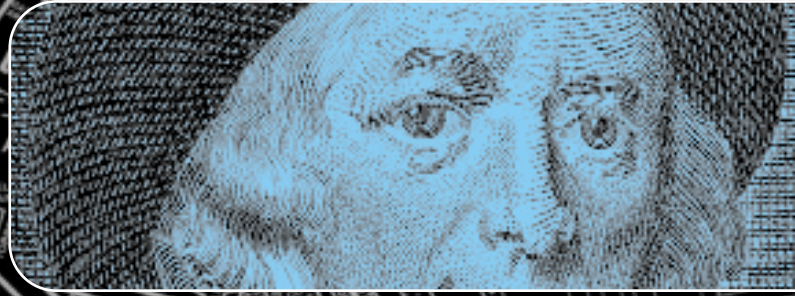


# ISLINGTON Local History Centre

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# EC1 Local History Trail



**ISLINGTON**  
Library & Cultural Services



On leaving Finsbury Library, **1** turn right down **St. John Street**. This is an ancient highway, originally leading from Smithfield to Barnet and the North. It was used by drovers to send their animals to the market. **Cross Skinner Street**. (William Godwin, the early 18th century radical philosopher and partner of Mary Wollstonecraft, lived in the street)

**Bear right off St John Street into Sekforde Street**. Suddenly you enter a quieter atmosphere...On the right hand side (rhs) is the Finsbury Savings Bank, **2** established at another site in 1816. Walk on past the Sekforde Arms (or go in if you fancy!) and **turn left into Woodbridge Street**. Sekforde and Woodbridge Streets were laid out in the 1820's and were part of the Sekforde Estate. **Walk down Woodbridge Street to Hayward's Place**. On the rhs stands the Clerkenwell Medical Mission, originally the Woodbridge Chapel **3** John Groom, who lived in Sekforde Street, also used this building for the 'Watercress & Flower Girls Christian Mission' (1894). As well as giving girls homes in the surrounding streets, blind and disabled girls were trained to make paper flowers in a workshop created in the basement. **Turn right into Hayward's Place and walk to the end**. Here you can look back up Sekforde Street and see the plaque to John Groom on lhs.

**Turn left into Sekforde Street. Turn left again into Aylesbury Street.**

**Cross the road to Jerusalem Passage**. At the entrance to the passage is a plaque to Thomas Britton 'the Musical Coalman' **4** As well as a coalman, he was a gifted musician who ran a club above his house which was visited by members of the Court and celebrated musicians.

**Walk down Jerusalem Passage. You'll enter St John's Square** The Square, which covers both sides of the Victorian Clerkenwell Road, broadly represents the area once covered by the medieval St. John's Priory. All that remains now is the Gateway **5** opposite you. The buildings on the lhs are the headquarters of St John Ambulance. The Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem was established around 1140. King John stayed at the Priory in 1212, as the area was a rural retreat from the City, but it was destroyed in the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. It was totally rebuilt and the Gateway was built in 1504.

**Walk across the Square to the Gateway, crossing Clerkenwell Road**. Before reaching the Gate, note the sign of the National Penny Bank on the left-hand wall. **Walk under the Gateway**. In the Gateway is the Museum of the Order of St. John. Guided tours are available.

**Walk into St. John's Lane**. This is another ancient road: it was once the main path from the Priory to the City of London, crossing the plain of Smithfield (literally: 'smooth field')

**Turn left into Passing Alley**. **6** Evidently, the name has been refined from its potent original of Pissing Alley! Half way along on both walls there are a pair of plaques...we are unsure of their significance! Leaving the alley, **turn right into St. John Street**. Walk down a little way, then **turn right into Peter's Lane**. **7** Before leaving St. John Street, look and you can still see the Victorian warehouse pulley on the building above 'No.1 The Gate'.

**Bear left in Peter's Lane, then turn r. into Cowcross St**. The name comes directly from its association with Smithfield Market, where until the 1850's live animals were herded through the streets to be sold. At the bottom of the street, you'll see Farringdon Station. **8** You can see the old Metropolitan Line sign for 'Farringdon & High Holborn'. It was one of the earliest stations to be completed (1863) and was a huge undertaking. As you walk down Cowcross St, **turn r. into Faulkner's Alley, then l. down Benjamin Street. Turn r. into Turnmill St**. This gives you a flavour of how the streets may have been: in the 18th century, the area around Turnmill St was known as Jack Ketch's Warren, as it was a maze of alleys, courts and passages. It was renowned for its poverty. Quite a contrast with today's loft conversions, which you see all around!

**Walk up Turnmill Street**, noting the open railway line on the left: imagine what an enormous excavation this must have been! (Our print will give you some idea) **Cross over Clerkenwell Rd into Farringdon Lane**. Ahead, you'll see 'Well Court'. Look through the windows and there is the Clerk's Well and some information boards. **9** **Double back and turn into Clerkenwell Green**. **10** On your r. is the Sessions House (1779). The front is decorated with friezes by Nollekens, showing Justice & Mercy. It's now a Masonic Hall. In the 17th century, the Green was affluent, but by the 19th, as Clerkenwell was heavily industrialised and very densely populated with poor workers, it became a centre of social & political protest..The Marx Memorial Library (37a), was originally an 18th century school for poor Welsh children, and later was the home of '20th Century Press', where Lenin published.

**Turn l. into Clerkenwell Close**. On the rhs is the Clerkenwell Visitors Centre – well worth a visit! Further on is St. James parish church. **11** Although a church has stood on the site since the 12th century, this was built in 1780's. Inside is a restored 18th century organ. **Follow the road round**, passing Clerkenwell Workshops. On the rhs is the old Hugh Myddleton School (1893), **12** named after the founder of the New River Company. The school was the site of 3 prisons: Clerkenwell Bridewell (1615), the New Prison and lastly the House of Detention, **12** built in the 1850's. The cells still survive in the basement. In 1867 there was a disastrous attempt to free Irish Nationalist remand prisoners by blowing up one of the perimeter walls. There is a plaque commemorating the loss of life in St. James church.

**Walk along Northampton Rd. Turn left at the 'Squared Circle'**. On the lhs is the London Metropolitan Archive, which houses a huge collection of London historical documents, maps and photos. On the rhs, Spa Fields **13** now somewhat dilapidated. These were pleasure gardens since the 17th century. Bull-baiting, fairs and gurning contests took place. They had a bad reputation, and theatregoers to Sadler's Wells paid to be escorted through. Spa Fields was also the site of a notorious burial ground: in 50 years from 1780's, about 8,000 bodies were buried in the tiny space. After a petition to Parliament, burials were finally stopped. It was converted to a public garden in 1886.

**At the cul-de-sac, turn r. Into Pine St**. On the rhs is the pioneering Finsbury Health Centre **14** (1938), designed by Berthold Lubetkin. It was a revolutionary public building, concentrating on light and space, and reflected the radical policies of Finsbury Council. (The borough also wanted Lubetkin to design its bomb shelters but this was vetoed by Central Govt!)

**Turn r. into Exmouth Market**. This has been a market since the 1890's and some of the buildings are 18th century. On the rhs stands the church of Our Most Holy Redeemer of Clerkenwell, built in 1887 on the site of Spa Fields Chapel **15** It's London's only Italian 'basilica' style church. On the bottom r. hand corner of Exmouth Market stood the 'London Spa', originally (1730) one of Clerkenwell's most famous resorts. It was rebuilt several times and was called the 'London Spa' **16** until 2002.

**Walk up Rosoman St.**, named after Thomas Rosoman who built Sadler's Wells in the 18th century.

**Turn r. into Rosebery Avenue**. On your right is Finsbury Town Hall, **17** bearing a plaque to Dadabhai Naoroji, Britain's first Asian MP. On the left are the offices of the New River Company, and subsequently the Metropolitan Water Board **18** – now private apartments. The original ponds and reservoirs of the New River, created in the 17th century to pipe fresh water to London from Hertfordshire, have disappeared under redevelopment.

**Cut through the little park on your r.** to see the Finsbury War Memorial. **Back on Rosebery Avenue**, to the left stands the new Sadler's Wells theatre, **19** completed 1998. Sadler's Wells began as a spa resort and was developed as a famous theatre in the 18th century and again by Lilian Baylis in the 1930's.

**Turn r. into St. John St** and walk down to the library. On the l. is City University developed in the 1890's as a night – school for local people.

**KEY:-**

- ① **FINSBURY LIBRARY** 245 St John Street
- ② **FINSBURY SAVINGS BANK** Sekforde Street
- ③ **CLERKENWELL MEDICAL MISSION** Woodbridge Street
- ④ **THOMAS BRITTON, 'the Musical Coalman'** Jerusalem Passage
- ⑤ **ST. JOHN'S GATEWAY** St. John's Square
- ⑥ **PASSING ALLEY**
- ⑦ **PETER'S LANE**
- ⑧ **FARRINGDON STATION** Cowcross Street
- ⑨ **THE CLERKS WELL** Farringdon Lane
- ⑩ **CLERKENWELL GREEN**
- ⑪ **ST. JAMES'S PARISH CHURCH** Clerkenwell Close
- ⑫ **HUGH MYDDLETON SCHOOL** Clerkenwell Close
- ⑫ **HOUSE OF DETENTION** Clerkenwell Close
- ⑬ **SPA FIELDS** Northampton Road
- ⑭ **FINSBURY HEALTH CENTRE** Pine Street
- ⑮ **SPA FIELDS CHAPEL** Exmouth Market
- ⑯ **'THE LONDON SPA'** Rosoman Street
- ⑰ **FINSBURY TOWN HALL** Rosebery Avenue
- ⑱ **METROPOLITAN WATER BOARD** Rosebery Avenue
- ⑲ **SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE** Rosebery Avenue



St James Church



Hugh Myddelton School



House of Detention



Finsbury Health Centre



Spa Fields Chapel



Exmouth Street & The London Spa



Clerkenwell Vestry Hall (Finsbury Town Hall)



Metropolitan Water Board Offices



Sadler's Wells Theatre



Passing alley Thomas Britton



St John's Gate



Farringdon Station



Clerkenwell Green



The Clerks Well

