

LONDON FOOTSTEPS

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Newsletter: June 2020

INTRODUCTION

Hello to everyone and this newsletter is to let you know that sometime we will meet up again to walk the streets of London hopefully before winter sets in. Trying to remain positive in these difficult times is not easy but I thought it was worth a try. So I am giving you an indication of the future I have for LONDON FOOTSTEPS and some of the ideas and thoughts which have been occupying part of my time.

Some of you have been coming on my walks for up to 10 years. They have always been social outings and a chance to have a chat and both are important contributions to the LONDON FOOTSTEPS experience. When further 'lockdown' restrictions are lifted and we are able to get out and about and venture further afield then I shall be able to design a programme which will abide by the rules. Until then, with social distancing likely to continue for some time, there is little chance of a Tour Guide leading 20-30 people around the City streets.

However, I am considering new walks away from the crowded areas; for example THE TIMBER TRAIL around Surrey Quays and Rotherhithe doesn't take us anywhere that is crowded. The same applies to the canals near MILE END and a visit to one of the Magnificent Seven cemeteries, maybe ABNEY PARK, would offer something that is intriguingly different. Some of the walks which I am now devising will depend on when I can get back to London for a thorough recce. This is what I am proposing:

FLEET FOOTED

The lost rivers of London have been a source of fascination for historians and City explorers for some years. Most of the old streams and tributaries of the Thames are hidden under the streets and buildings and one of the largest and best known is the River Fleet. Now it exists as a large underground sewer but this walk follows the route of the river from King's Cross, through Clerkenwell, down Farringdon Road, Holborn, Smithfield, Ludgate Circus, the Fleet Valley and finally to the point near the Thames at Blackfriars which Christopher Wren once imagined as an area similar to the Grand Canal in Venice.

THE COCK AND PYE DITCH

It doesn't sound very appealing – and it wasn't ! This area around Holborn had some of the worst and unhealthiest housing conditions in London. The nearby Cock and Pye inn, which gave its name to this stream, offered customers a speciality dish, 'peacock in a pie', which was served up with the peacock's head and tail feathers sticking out of the crust. Think of that as we step into Wetherspoons! It is difficult to imagine that around Long Acre, St. Martin's Lane, Monmouth Street and Seven Dials, with its smart restaurants and fancy shops, was an area where those who lived and worked here had such miserable existence.

WALBROOK WALKABOUT

The Walbrook is one of the shortest rivers to flow through London. Like several others, it is now underground but can be seen flowing from an outfall pipe close to Cannon Street station. There is still some doubt about the source of the River Walbrook but if we start the walk around the Curtain Road area of Shoreditch – or the sewer ditch as it was once known as - and make our way via London Wall, Moorgate, the Bank and on to Cannon Street. You won't even see a puddle – unless it rains – but will be stepping through a rich stream of Roman and Saxon history.

SLAVERY AND THE CITY

Many of you know that the subject of Britain's involvement in the slave trade has been an underlying theme on several of my walks. London was at the centre of the slave trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the recent 'Black Lives Matter' protests has brought the shame and misery of this period into sharp focus. The evil trade has been condemned again in newspapers, on radio and television and the social media.

We can never stop asking questions as we turn the pages of history. It is necessary to scrutinise monarchs, statesmen, political giants, campaigning women, dictators, adventurers, revolutionaries, artists, writers – and so the list can go on. This is how we can understand more about what happened in previous centuries; we need to see the light and shade of history, delve into the dark corners and if some previously lauded human beings are revealed as cheats, liars, murderers, ruthless, greedy, philanderers or whatever then we get closer to the truth which, as in the current situation, is not just painful but abhorrent.

Now the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, is suggesting an enquiry into the memorials, statues, buildings, parks, and gardens which, literally, raise some figures onto a pedestal of achievement which they do not deserve. Does the larger-than-life figure of William Beckford, who inherited an estate of 13 Jamaican sugar plantations-and approximately 3,000 slaves and was twice Lord Mayor of London, deserve a place in the Guildhall alongside statues of Churchill, Nelson, Wellington and Pitt the Younger?

Between 1660 and 1690, 15 Lord Mayors, 25 sheriffs and 38 aldermen of the City were shareholders of the Royal Africa Company which had exclusive slave-trading rights to ship goods to Africa, then transport slaves across the Atlantic and return to London with rum, spices, tobacco and cotton.

There are others – and they made fortunes. Sir Thomas Guy, founder of Guy's Hospital was granted a monopoly to trade in slaves with the Spanish Colonies; Sir John Cass who is remembered today for using his wealth to fund the Cass Foundation, the Cass Business School and other places that bear his name; Sir Francis Baring, the son of a German immigrant who became the first of the Baring baronets and founded a banking empire that had considerable interests in the slave trade. Bankers, merchants, shipping and investment companies thrived as London reaped the commercial and financial benefits.

Two of the earliest dock construction projects at Wapping attracted rich City merchants and investors who saw large profits to be made from the triangle trade between Britain, West Africa and the Caribbean. Robert Milligan was the driving force behind the building of the secure West India Docks – and he had the money to make it happen. His investment in slavery was threatened when London struggled to cope with rising crime from gangs plundering cargoes waiting to be loaded or unloaded on the overcrowded quayside.

Milligan was honoured for being a visionary in creating and funding the late eighteenth century project. A large and imposing statue of him was erected outside the Museum of Docklands when it opened in 2003. On the plinth there was no mention of his slave trading activities. On Tuesday 9th June 2020 it was taken down and put into storage.

And so the story continues but who knows how far it can reach into the City of today? Could the pent-up anger and frustration that finally caught up with Edward Colston's legacy and saw Milligan lifted unceremoniously from his dominating position in Docklands go further than symbolism? If it does then another page in a painful period of Britain's colonial past will be revealed.

Taking down or isolating the statues, busts, memorials and other reminders could be just a knee-jerk reaction in the light of what has happened world-wide in the past two weeks. Is it part of a wider protest against racism in the UK rather than drawing attention to the history of slave trading? What more will be needed to change attitudes and therefore prompt a re-assessment of history? Whatever happens – or doesn't happen – there will be deep consequences for London and the rest of the UK. It will be interesting to see how the City deal with it.

...And a last word about talks and presentations

All my bookings which were confirmed from March to early October have been red-carded by Boris Johnson and Matt Hancock but It has been an opportunity to create some new talks supported by PowerPoint. These were prepared several weeks ago when I was invited to be a Guest Speaker on *mv Columbus* cruising from Tilbury to the Canary Islands.

That was cancelled because of the virus and I was left with talks featuring HAMBURG, AMSTERDAM, GIBRALTAR, LISBON and MADEIRA. They have been added to my catalogue. A further 4 new presentations will also be included for the first time and here they are:

NEWSREELS AND REAL NEWS

When the newsreels first appeared in the late Victorian era, thousands went to the cinema to see the jerky black and white images accompanied by music and captions. Seventy years later Pathe, Movietone, Fox, Rank and other newsreels were disappearing fast as television became the dominant news outlet. What have we learned from those early newsreels that fashion today's endless outpouring of news? I was part of the Pathe news team for five years in the late 1960s and use this experience to create this talk.

HORSE-POWER BEFORE LOCOMOTION

As Britain recovered from the Great Fire of 1660, London was being transformed with new buildings – albeit on the same road pattern. The population was growing rapidly and the roads were becoming busy with all forms of transport from carts to coaches. Stagecoaches criss-crossed the country as more routes were opened up; the Royal Mail extended their service; the coach-building industry boomed and the legendary highwaymen and footpads cashed in – literally! Coach travel reached the end of the road when the railways arrived.

SHOP TILL YOU DROP

During the Victorian era, department stores were emporiums of excitement and fascination for those who were more familiar with small general stores and open-air markets. It led to the creation of some famous shops – Selfridges, Marks and Spencer, Gamage, Whiteleys, Hamleys, Harrods, Derry & Tomas, Barkers of Kensington, Bourne & Hollingsworth – and some of the extraordinary and flamboyant characters who created a new shopping experience for millions of middle and working class people.

GRANDAD NEVER TOLD US

Over 30 years ago and after making many visits to the Far East and Singapore in particular, I became intrigued to know more about the men of the Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire Regiments who were sent to defend British colonial interests from the invading Japanese in 1941-42. This led me on a personal journey to track down men who had been captured and spent over three years in labour camps. Many died while others never spoke about their prison experiences to wives or children but the words of survivors I met provide the background to this talk.

THE VIKINGS

This is a story which takes a closer look at the myths of the Viking explorers and adventurers. They have gained a reputation for being brutal, invading warriors but these Scandinavians were prepared to travel deep into Europe and beyond to seek a better life. . They crossed uncharted oceans and even hauled their ships overland to establish new colonies in less hostile climates than their homelands. They were skilled engineers and boat-builders and traces of their settlements have been found as far away as Afghanistan .

I hope you have enjoyed reading this newsletter which comes at a time which is far from normal in many ways. Normality from a LONDON FOOTSTEPS point of view means making plans to organise more walks and arranging talks to members of clubs and organisations. That should begin to fill up those blank pages in my diary.

If you require further details of any walks or are interested in considering a future talk for your club then please get in touch. I look forward to hearing from you.

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