

LONDON FOOTSTEPS

David Williams: City of London guide-lecturer

Tel: 01702 710232 Mob: 07831 857382

Emails: davidwilliams@dwmedia.co.uk; david171238@gmail.com;

www.londonfootsteps.co.uk



Newsletter: New Year 2021

As I write this opening paragraph, we are facing 2021 with a good deal of uncertainty and apprehension. Now, as the most harrowing year that most of us can remember has passed, it would help if a large dose of optimism was available as well as the Pfizer or Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccinations.

It has been difficult to concentrate on London walks and talks knowing I can only see some of you during an on-line Zoom presentation. I realised quickly that despite the advantages of this form of communication it fails to bridge the gap between you in the comfort of your homes and me sitting in front of a couple of computer screens. Technology brings us together but I miss the personal interaction with people before, during and after a talk.

Walks are the same. I chat - some people may consider too much - and give all my groups plenty of snippets of information about London's historical, cultural and social scene which I believe to be interesting and intriguing.

Looking back over the 15 years since launching LONDON FOOTSTEPS, hardly a week has gone by when I haven't given some thought to researching and developing new walks.

It was January 2006 when the first Newsletter and walking programme was distributed. I was uncertain at the time whether anyone was likely to sign up for that first walk. It was a pleasant surprise when 14 turned up.

So a big thank to all of you who have supported my efforts for so long. Many of those who met up at Fenchurch Street Station for that debut walk and followed me on a tour called, appropriately, INTRODUCTION TO THE CITY, have become friends. And this is the time of year when, more than ever, we remember how important friends can be.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

London is a city that is constantly changing, meeting fresh challenges, facing disasters, and becoming a forest of even taller buildings. When the *Shard* went up in an area now known as London Bridge Quarter it marked a dramatic revision of architectural ideas and style.



It also highlighted the unusual nicknames for buildings. Some looked curvy, others had angular shapes, many seemed to be a mass of glass and steel. We now have the

Walkie Talkie, the *Cheesegrater*, the *Gherkin*, the *Scalpel* and the *Can of Ham*. In some cases, construction was put on hold as planning permissions were revised or financial difficulties emerged. A few more will certainly appear in the years ahead although the helter-skelter design for the Pinnacle in Bishopsgate has been dropped.

Nicknames are either a clever marketing idea or just a jokey way of drawing attention to a new addition on the City skyline. If you address a package to 60-70 St Mary Axe then it is better known to couriers and the postal service as the *Can of Ham* because it has the shape of a tin of ham you can buy in a supermarket.

The *Walkie Talkie* is 20 Fenchurch Street but that sounds rather pedestrian. The building gained a strange kind of notoriety on a cloudless day in September 2013 when the sun reflected from the concave glass on the southern side of the building and melted the paintwork of a parked Jaguar car. That quickly made the headlines and the nickname soon became *Walkie Scorchie!*



At that time the *Walkie Talkie* was nearing completion but the owners apologised and paid up the £946 repair costs. The building later won the *Carbuncle Cup* for ugliness. It was the second time one of the designs by Uruguayan architect Rafael Vinoly had caused similar problems. Previously it happened at the newly-built Vdara Hotel in Las Vegas. Employees of Vdara hotel called the fierce reflected sun as the *Vdara Death Ray* !

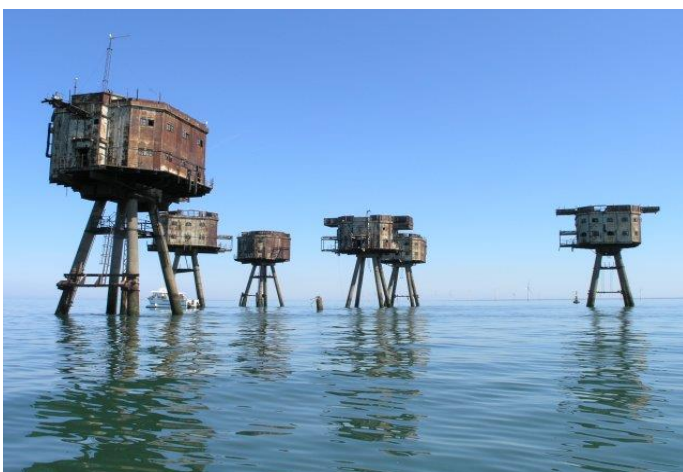
The wedge-shaped *Cheesegrater* narrows as it reaches the upper floors to make sure it does not obscure the protected views of the distant St. Paul's Cathedral. Yet look around and think of the famous London buildings which have become better known because of their nicknames.

Take *Big Ben* for example. That's also a nickname – even if there is some dispute about the origin. Was the bell named after Sir Benjamin Hall, the first Commissioner of Works in the 1850s or was it Ben Caunt, a champion bare-knuckle prize-fighter of the 19th century who had a huge chest and a booming voice?

The City skyline has frequently changed in appearance over the past 2,000 years and that trend continues in the 21st century. So I need to reflect on what is happening today and revise my original ideas and route for the INTRODUCTION TO THE CITY walk without ignoring the past! Watch out for the 21st century version of this walk in the Spring – hopefully!

[TO THE RIVER'S END \(Gunners Park\)](#)

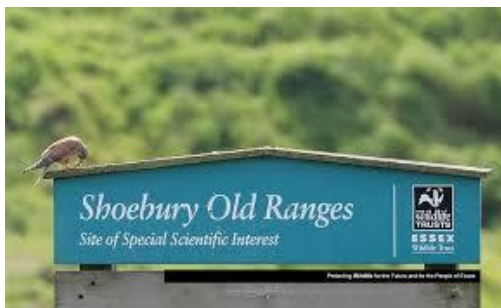
It is hardly surprising that the Thames Path is so popular whether you walk just 5 miles or the 215 from the source of the river at Kemble in



Gloucestershire to the Estuary at Southend. That is quite a hike but well worth the effort. There are so many reasons to stop on the way to admire, marvel, explore and investigate what you see on both North and South banks of the river.

This has prompted me to create a new walk to reveal the Estuary story beyond Southend featuring Bronze and Iron Age settlements, the value of the mudflats to wild life and migrating birds, the development of the Shoebury Gun ranges in the 19th century, the cockle fishing industry, the pirate radio station on one of the abandoned wartimes fort, the offshore international airport plans for Maplin Sands and the weapons testing Ministry of Defence establishment on Foulness Island.

There are stories to be told about the accidental explosion on the firing ranges in 1885 which killed six men, Screaming Lord Sutch of the Monster Raving Loony Party and one of the largest off-shore wind farms in the British Isles and the amount of ordnance hidden in the mud offshore.



The proposed walk will be on designated paths around Gunners Park, which is maintained by Essex Wildlife Trust on land once part of the Ministry of Defence set-up. The military buildings in the area have Grade II listing and the walk will start from

nearby Shoebury Rail Station (C2C line from Fenchurch Street).

I hope this walk could start in the Spring if and when Government restrictions are lifted. Interested organisations and individuals should let me know and I can make more definite plans on timings, meeting places and confirm the route for a comfortable walk of around 2 miles.

TALKING FOR CHARITY

Charities are having a hard time at the moment. Income from donations has dropped for nearly all of them, shops have closed and staff have been isolating. Many are struggling to provide the support and help to those who need it most.

Recently I have been considering the possibility of adapting some of my own London history talks to raise money for charity. More people are now using Zoom technology to speak to friends and relatives so if there is sufficient interest, I will be giving Zoom talks to groups and individuals who 'sign up' to this scheme. So please read on ...

You are invited to join these London talks via Zoom on selected dates in January. These will be as follows:

Tuesday, 12th January (2.00 pm): MIND THE GAP

The London Underground is the oldest subterranean railway system in World and was hailed as a great engineering achievement when it opened in 1863. In the early decades, investors and industrialists saw the prospect of making a lot of money. Some did, others had fraudulent ideas which gave the Tube a massive financial headache. But this is also a story about enterprising and far-sighted planners, designers and engineers who revived the fortunes of a railway system that is essential to London's development.

Friday, 22nd January (2.00 pm): END OF THE HIGH STREET?

The events of 2020 have been crippling for the retail industry. Small shops and large department stores are shutting their doors and familiar names are disappearing from the High Street. The origins of the shopping 'empires' date back over 300 years when 'going shopping' became a leisure outing and not just a necessity. This story looks at how small, linen and drapery shops grew into department stores run by ambitious men who became 'retail giants'. So when did it start to go wrong?

Each talk will last about an hour and be supported by PowerPoint presentations. It's free to sign up for the talks. However, you are invited to make a charitable donation to the FAIR HAVENS HOSPICES in Southend who recently moved from their original home in converted houses to a purpose-built site. FAIR HAVENS HOSPICES have welcomed my suggestions.

If you are familiar with Zoom then you will know how easy it is to get involved. I have a Zoom Pro Licence which does not restrict the time you are on-line. If you haven't done so already, you will need to download the Zoom app to your PC and enter the meeting identity number and password which I will be send to you a few days prior to the talk.

I hope you feel this is worth supporting during these difficult times.