

VISIT TO SPITALFIELDS



On the Sevenoaks U3A outing to Spitalfields, located near Liverpool Street Station, we learnt that Spitalfields was a Roman cemetery, outside the walls of Londinium. In the 12th Century there was a hospital surrounded by fields hence (ho)spitalfields associated with a Priory which was dissolved by Henry VIII. When the Huguenots were escaping from France in the late 17th Century they settled there and established a silk weaving industry. In 1638 Charles I gave a license for a market, which we all associate with the name Spitalfields. In the 1730s the Irish Weavers moved in with the decline of Irish linen, in the 1860s a new population of Jewish refugees were drawn to the area and brought in the textile industry.

In the later 19th century the area declined and was infamous for its poverty and crime with common boarding houses and Jack the Ripper. In the 20th century the Jewish presence diminished and was replaced by an influx of Bangladeshi immigrants continuing the textile trend and making Brick Lane the curry capital of London.

The unique architecture of the area has been preserved helped by the formation of the Spitalfields Neighbourhood Planning Forum. More recently it has become trendy with some well known celebrities moving there and businesses from the adjacent City of London expanding outwards. One building that was pointed out to us but not visited was Dennis Sever's House in Folgate Street which is preserved as a typical Huguenot silk weaver's family home.

Unfortunately it was one of the hottest days of this summer and some of our members visibly wilted towards the end of the walk. An interesting place to visit !

John Esler