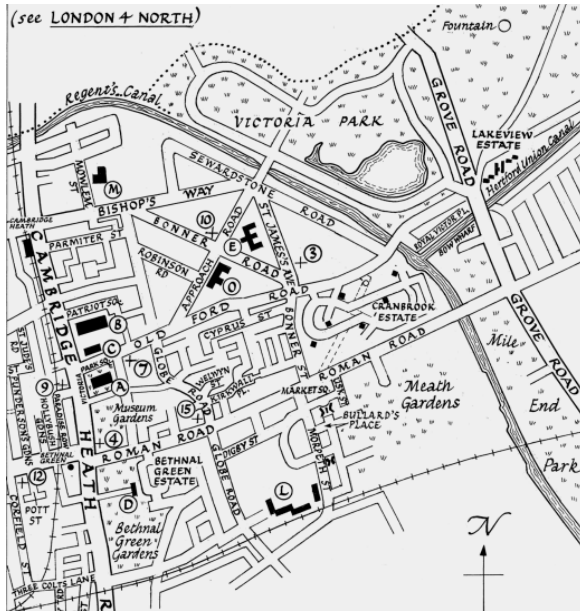


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Pevsner Architectural Guides

Story of London Walking Trails: Bethnal Green & Victoria Park



Start at Bethnal Green Station (Central Line), outside **St John's Church (4)** of 1826-8 by *Sir John Soane* and one of the many early nineteenth century churches built in the London suburbs by the Church Commissioners.

Interior remodelled in 1871 (window tracery of the same date) and chancel extended 1888 by *G.F. Bodley*. Restoration of the church has been underway since 2004. The interior has late nineteenth century fittings and Stations of the Cross of 2009 by *Chris Gollon*.

The Green was a popular residential neighbourhood from the mid-seventeenth century and the owners of houses around the green ensured its preservation by purchasing it on behalf of the poor. Most of the land lies north and south of the church but also includes the narrow strip in front of **Paradise Row**, a terrace of early nineteenth century houses.

South of St John is Bethnal Green Gardens, that part of the Green acquired by the London County Council in 1985 and laid out as public gardens. A pathway separates this from Museum Gardens, acquired by the Government in 1865 for the erection of a museum, now the **V&A Museum of Childhood (A)**. The building, opened 1872, has a brick exterior encasing an iron-framed structure of 1855-6. This had been designed for the original, temporary, museum at South Kensington but dismantled when permanent buildings were erected there (now the V&A Museum). The façade incorporates mosaics representing agriculture, science and the arts, designed by *F.W. Moody* and executed

by students at the Art Training School in South Kensington. The front porch was rebuilt in 2005 by *Caruso St John*.



North-east of the Museum is **Netteswell House**, probably built c.1650, indicated by the two curved gables with their pediments which are characteristic of houses of the early-mid seventeenth century. There was an earlier house with a private chapel (later used by the residents of the Green) on the site of which are now four houses (**The Terrace**) of c.1787 built by Rev. Anthony Natt, the owner of Netteswell House. They have their fronts facing the Museum and have doors ornamented with *Coade* stone, a fashionable motif. E of Netteswell House on **Victoria Park Square** is the **R.C. Church and Priory of Our Lady of the Assumption (7)**, designed by *Edward Goldie*, 1911-13, for an order of Augustinians, who were founded in Nîmes in 1847 but forced into exile in London in 1901. Good furnishings inside.

There are more eighteenth century houses on **Old Ford Road** to the north and **York Hall (C)** of 1929 (built for public baths, washhouse and swimming pool which could be floored over to create a public hall).

North along **Cambridge Heath Road** is the former **Town Hall (B)**, the smartest of such buildings in Tower Hamlets. The part facing the street, in a Baroque style very typical of Edwardian municipal buildings, is 1909-10 by



Percy Robinson & W. Alban Jones and has lavish interiors. The sculpture, by *Henry Poole*, symbolises the Municipality protecting the industries of the Borough. To the rear

is an extension of 1937-9 by *E.C.P. Monson*, again typical of the date, very plain outside but with streamlined Art Deco panelled interiors (extensively used for films and television). On the outside is a relief depicting the legend of the 'Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green'.

Now return to Old Ford Road and walk east to **Approach Road**. This street was planned in the 1840s as an avenue leading to the gates of Victoria Park and it was envisaged that large villas would be built. Terraced houses were built instead, mostly complete by 1870, along with the Parmiter's Foundation School of 1887 by *T. Chatfeild Clarke* (now occupied by **Raine's**

Foundation School (O), founded in Wapping, with extensions) and the **London Chest Hospital (E)**, the main part of which was built in 1851 by *F.W. Ordish*. This was one of the first consumption (tuberculosis) hospitals in London. The site close to the park, and at that date on the outer edge of the most heavily built up areas of the city, was considered beneficial to the patients. Between the hospital and the park itself is the **Park View Estate** of 1950-53, one of several schemes of housing built by the London County Council in the East End after the Second World War.

Victoria Park was the first and largest (at 290 acres) of London's nineteenth century parks. It was designed by *James Pennethorne*, of Her Majesty's Office of Works, and opened in 1845. It is bounded on the south by the Regent's Canal (1820 which runs south to Limehouse) and



south-east by Burdett's Canal which links the Regent's Canal to the River Lea Navigation. Grove Road divides the park into two parts. The smaller part, lying close to Bethnal Green, was laid out with many elaborate landscape features, buildings and sculpture. Much of this has gone (although restoration took place in the 1990s) but especially notable is the Drinking Fountain given by the wealthy philanthropist Baroness Burdett-Coutts in 1862.

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