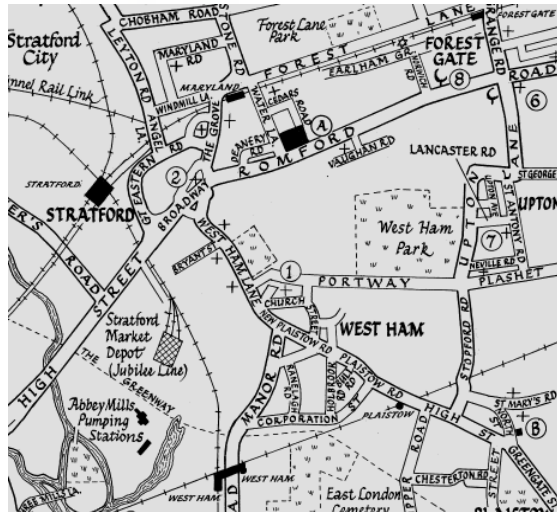


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Story of London Walking Trails: All Saints, West Ham & vicinity



The medieval parish of West Ham was once part of Essex. Before the borough of Newham was formed in 1965, the River Lea was the eastern boundary of Greater London. For much of the 18th and early 19th centuries West Ham was a quiet backwater, dotted with villas, farms and parkland. With the passing of the Metropolitan Building Act in 1844, which restricted dangerous and noxious industries from Greater London, more and more factories and industry sprung up east of the River Lea and around Stratford, with its rail hub and goods yards. West Ham village, centered around **All Saints church**, remained a middle class enclave with some large houses in their own grounds – these were slowly consumed by rows



of Victorian terraces as London's suburban sprawl crept eastward. The area was heavily bombed in World War II - 14,000 homes were lost. Post-war housing estates now dominate, though something of West Ham's former glory can still be felt in its grand parish church and some surviving buildings around **West Ham Park**.

This trail explores **All Saints Church (1)** with the option to continue to **West Ham Park** and Upton Lane.

All Saints West Ham

The present church was begun around 1180 by Gilbert de Montfichet, Lord of the Manor, possibly on the site of a Saxon church. Three blocked-up **clerestory windows** on each side of the nave hint at its original character. The church eventually fell under the jurisdiction of the nearby Cistercian Abbey of Stratford Langthorne- dissolved at the Reformation and demolished in the 19th century, a stone with **carved skulls** from the abbey's chancel house survives just inside the entrance.

The church was greatly enlarged in the reign of Henry II (13th c.) - the outer walls broken up with arches carried on pillars, north and south aisles added, and the nave extended east and west. Indeed,

the church is of such a substantial size that it was at one point considered for cathedral status in Essex. The **nave roof**, of cambered tie beams on curved braces, probably dates c. 1500. During the Tudor period, the chancel chapels were completed- the exterior of the **north chapel** retains a wonderful rood stair and turret in red and blue Tudor brickwork. This chapel seems to have been paid for from the proceeds of the sale of valuable Church Plate, which was sold before it could be confiscated by the Crown during the Reformation.



The impressive stone **tower**, in the perpendicular style, was built early in the 15th century and rises 74 feet. The **tower clock** was made by Dents in 1857, a prototype for that produced for Big Ben two years later. The tower shows signs of repairs in the SPAB style (using terracotta tiles to differentiate the repairs from original fabric) by William Wier, 1904-5.

In the 18th and 19th centuries galleries were added (later removed), the organ installed in the West Gallery (now moved to east end) and pews added. A restoration was undertaken by George Dyson and Sir George Gilbert Scott (architect of the Albert Memorial), 1847-9.

The *interior* contains a fine selection of fittings, ranging from a **medieval font** from Stratford Langthorne to **Royal Arms** from the reigns of George II and William IV. Carved memorial stones are set into the floor and there is also a rare pre-Reformation **wall painting** high on the



wall near the **south chapel**, uncovered in 1977. The **sanctuary** has a Minton tiled floor and **reredos** of ogee arches framing sparkling gold mosaic plaques of Moses, St John, St Peter and David, designed 1866 by Sir George Gilbert Scott. The **east window**, with scenes from the life of Christ was added about the same time by Clayton & Bell.

Two of the best of the church's varied collection of funerary monuments are on the **east wall of the north chapel**, both with life-size figures set within pedimented niches. On the left, the monument of **Sir Thomas Foot (1688) and his wife Elizabeth**. Foot was a wealthy city Grocer and Lord Mayor of London during the Commonwealth (1649-50). His statue is finely dressed and bedecked with chains of office. To the right, the memorial of **James & Mrs Cooper (1743)**, local benefactors who built almshouses nearby. The statues stand together in a grand niche framed by carved scrolls and cherubs heads. On the north wall, a smaller plaque to **Robert Rooke and his two wives (1630)**, the



heads sadly missing, and their 7 children (the youngest sleeping) kneeling in prayer below.

In the **south chapel** (called St Thomas's Chapel) is a fine memorial of alabaster and black marble columns to **William Fawcitt (d.1631) & Mrs Fawcitt and her 2nd husband (1636)** – Fawcitt reclines beneath kneeling figures of his wife and her 2nd husband. On the east wall, a large monument with columns and urns to **Sir John Smyth and family (1706)** attributed to Grinling Gibbons. Smyth was Lord Mayor of London.



From the **churchyard** walk east along Portway to **West Ham Park**. It was formed from the Upton House estate, laid out as a botanical garden by Dr John Fothergill in the 1760s. The City of London and local residents helped purchase the site and opened it as a park in 1874. Covering 77 acres, it is the largest park in Newham. From June 2009 **artist Claire Newton** will display vast photo collages based on the history and culture of East London inside the park near the southern gates. Facing the east side of the park in Upton Lane are **Meggs Almshouses**, founded in Whitechapel c.1658 by William Meggs and moved here in 1893. Further north on Upton Lane (west side) is **The Spotted Dog**, a 16th century coaching inn with Victorian extension, said to have been a Kennel for Henry VIII's hunting dogs. It currently awaits restoration.

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