

SHARED ROOTS IN FAITH

Why the East of London?

The term 'East End' was not used until late in the 19th century, and the boundaries of the area to which it refers are not clear. The area began as small clusters of villages on the outskirts of the city, but rapidly grew, with London's population. When St. Katharine's Docks were constructed in 1827, many people came to the area in search of work and the East End became infamous for being a hotbed of disease and the squalid dwellings of the London's poorest. The East End has always been a melting pot of varied faiths, cultures and traditions, as a settling place for many immigrants, having played host to numerous waves of immigration through the decades.

The three Abrahamic faiths have been influential in transforming the East End into the varied, exciting and multicultural place it is now. Not only did immigrants past and present bring with them cuisine, languages and traditions, but the faiths that influenced their lifestyles. The East End boast numerous churches, mosques and synagogues frequented by those of all nationalities, and as demand for places of worship rises and falls, so too do the plac-

es of worship. One of the aims of this project is to understand the shared heritage of the three faiths in the East End and achieved by meeting and interviewing volunteers who have lived in the area at some point. By making use of oral history in this way, the project will be relevant to the community, be rich in authentic and diverse human experience and draw a personal and real portrait of a complex and culturally wealthy area of the Capital.

Christianity

During the 16th and 17th centuries many Huguenots (also referred to as French Protestants), were driven from France as a result of religious persecution. It is thought that around 50, 000 Huguenots came to Britain during this time, many of whom settled in London, largely settling in Spitalfields. Their silk-weaving skills twinned with their Calvinist work ethic meant business thrived. Many accumulated wealth and affording to buy houses, consequently moving further out to the more affluent London suburbs. The Huguenots left their mark on the East End, with many streets retaining distinctly French names. Despite there being 23 French Protestant churches in London at the height of their influx, now only one remains in Soho Square. In modern day terms, the East London boasts a multitude of churches each concealing their own unique past.



One example in the East End is St Boniface German Catholic Church on Adler Street, founded in 1809. Before World War One, the German population in the East End was sizeable and St Boniface's was home to a number of community services, helping the poor and uneducated, and even opening a German primary school. After the outbreak of war, many Germans were deported and the church attendance fell. St Boniface was damaged repeatedly during air raids, and was allegedly the first building to be hit by German bombers during the Blitz. Despite the German population of



St John's in Bethnal Green

East London's decline the church remains in regular use and stands as a remarkable example of modernist church décor.