

Pathways to the Past

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On your Marks...

It's been a very busy couple of months with walks and talks. Sometimes I've been walking in very hot sun and sometimes in pouring rain.

In the sunny spells the City churches are stunning. To see the fascinatingly complex tower of St. Bride's glistening like icing on a wedding cake, or the long façade of St. Lawrence Jewry – a great slab of white punctuated by its huge windows, is absolutely glorious when domed by the azure blue of the sky above.

Taking people into churches like St. Mary Aldermary, St. James Garlickhythe and St. Sepulchre always makes me particularly excited, for here I can also bring in my passion for war memorials and military associations. To see objects like the original wooden crosses erected on the battlefields and then brought home to be proudly displayed in a particular church opens up fascinating questions about community, belonging and identity. The churches of the City of London are treasure boxes in so many ways. Come and explore them with me.

Mark



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Western Front



Arts and Crafts go East: Ruminghem Chinese Cemetery



Deep in Pas de Calais, deep in what was the rear area of the trench lines, is the tiny village of Ruminghem. Visiting Ruminghem requires a very definite decision. It means making an effort, for it is not a place you happen to pass-by on the way to one of the Great War battlefields. Of course, the cemetery's very location reveals much about the role of the men buried here. As members of the Chinese Labour Corps, the majority of their work was behind the lines. The only way military operations could be maintained at the front was through the blood, sweat, and, doubtless, tears too, of a myriad of ancillary services unloading, building, repairing and hauling to and from the frontlines. Ruminghem was the headquarters of No. 11 Labour Group and the home of a Chinese hospital, hence the cemetery.

For the visitor who has gone to the time and trouble of seeking out the cemetery, the initial sensation might be one of disappointment. There it is, tucked away at the end of a narrow country road-cum-track on the western edge of the village, and it turns out to be nothing more than a simple square containing only 75 graves. But the glories of its deliberate modesty soon begin to work their magic...

[Click here to read the full article on my website.](#)

Forthcoming London walks

Friday 17 July

10.30am: Railway stations and passengers: from King's Cross to Paddington

2.30pm: Writers, Printers and Protesters: Fleet Street and the alleys and courts of the City

Wednesday 22 July

2pm: Spires and Towers: the churches of the City of London

Thursday 13 August

10.30am: Refugees and Reformers: Jewish Whitechapel and Huguenot Spitalfields

2.30pm: The Barbican Estate: the Phoenix of the Blitz

Thursday 27 August

2.00pm: Upstairs, Downstairs: the squares, shops and spooks of the West End

Friday 11 September

2.00pm: London's First World War memorials

Walks above are 2.5 hours and cost £25 per person

[Click here to find out more and book](#)

Thursday 17 September

Full day Circle Line walk – do contact me for details.

London



Smells and bells: the glory of Atkinson's, 24 Old Bond Street



Anyone who wanders along Bond Street – New or Old – can easily become entranced. Shop after shop display the wares of the most prestigious and famous brands in the world. Huge glass windows and bright signs present the luxuries available to those who have the right depth of wallet or sufficient bendiness to their credit card. Among this cornucopia is Ferragamo. It resides in a building that, I would dare to suggest, outshines even this illustrious brand. Designed by the architect E. Vincent Harris, for the perfumier Atkinson, and completed in 1926, it is a fusion wonder, a blend of many scents, just right for its first occupant.

The walk up Old Bond Street from Piccadilly reveals a wondrous elevation. It is relatively narrow and soars upwards topped by a sharp gable. It's as if the tip of something has been found in the ground by a giant pair of plyers and then dragged upwards...

[Click here to read the full article on my website.](#)

1 August 1932



After a very long time in gestation, the central memorial to the missing of the Somme, the Thiepval Memorial, was finally unveiled on Monday 1 August 1932. Despite the presence of the French President and the Prince of Wales, and despite the display of military glory by detachments of the French and British armies, a Monday unveiling on a far from blazing summer day meant that Sir Edwin Lutyens's sublime masterpiece was presented to the world in a rather low-key manner. Thiepval was complete, but unlike Blomfield's Menin Gate in the heart of bustling Ypres with its nightly Last Post ceremony, this was a memorial a long way from the pulse of life, and interpreting its form and symbolism was far more of a challenge than with Blomfield's rich classicism...

[Click here to read the full article on my website.](#)

[Click here to watch the film I made with my friend, Ross Barnwell, on this most fabulous of memorials.](#)



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