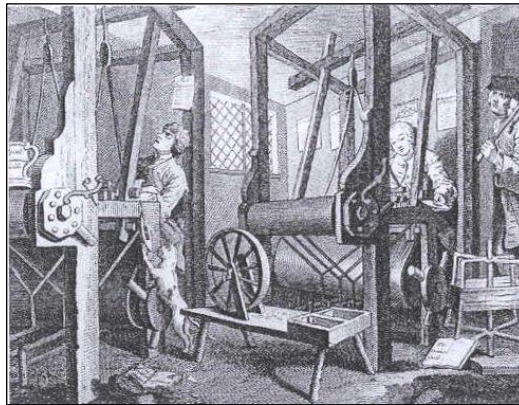


13 PRINCELET STREET SPITALFIELDS

History Album



Compiled and written by Caroline Stanford

November 2004

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13 PRINCELET STREET: BASIC DETAILS

Built: 1719, for developers Charles Wood and Simon Mitchell by stone mason Edward Buckingham

Listed: Grade II

Acquired by Landmark: 2004, bequeathed by Peter Lerwill

Restoration

Architect: Julian Harrap, with Gary Butler and Judy Allen, for Peter Lerwill in 1987

Architect 2004: David Newton for Landmark

Contractors (1987 and 2004): Fullers Ltd

Opened as a Landmark: December 2004

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Reader Volume

Charles Dickens, Spitalfields, from *Household Words* (1851)

Photographs of 13 Princelet Street in Peter Lerwill's time

Fournier Street Conservation Policy, June 1976

Two case studies of Spitalfields buildings (No. 15 Elder Street and No. 2 Fournier Street) from D. Cruikshank & N. Burton, *Life in the Georgian City* (1990)

SUMMARY

13 Princelet Street is typical of the speculative housing that sprang up in Spitalfields in the 18th century. Quite apart from coping with population increase, the whole city had been in the throes of a massive reconstruction campaign since the Great Fire of London in 1666 and this gave rise to a new breed of speculative builders, developing sites and buildings purely for profit. Spitalfields, named after a 12th-century hospital, lay outside the City walls (which ran more or less along today's Bishopsgate) and from the Middle Ages had attracted enterprising outsiders, whose birth or origin barred them from trading or living in the City. Most important of such groups in the late 17th and early 18th centuries were the French Protestants known as Huguenots, fleeing religious persecution by the Catholic regime. Huguenots had congregated in this rural hamlet since Elizabeth's reign and brought with them many skills – clockmaking, jewellery making, silver smithing and, especially, silk weaving. The Huguenot weavers provided an injection of new ideas into an already flourishing native industry, living in the tall, dignified houses we still see today. They were a thrifty, hard working, godly community, who decorated their houses with window boxes, hung singing birds outside them and sought inspiration for their silk designs from the insects and flowers in the fields around them.

Princelet Street (first known as Princesses or Princes Street) was one of the first streets to be built, from around 1705 to 1720. It was part of the planned development of a piece of ground known as Joyce's Garden by Charles Wood and Simon Mitchell, businessmen who bought the land and then leased it on at a peppercorn rent to the master builders and craftsmen, who erected the houses for onward lease or sale. No. 13 (at first known as No. 21) was leased to and built by a stone mason called Edward Buckingham on a 60 year lease, in 1718/9. Together with Folgate Street and Spital Square, Princelet Street held the most prosperous houses in the area, home to master weavers and wealthy merchants. We know the names of those who have lived at No.13 but not, until the mid- to late-18th century, their professions. Certainly by the 1740s residents have recognisably French names (L'Amy, Durade, Allard...) and by the 1780s we know from Trade Directories that there were silk weavers living in the house.

However, prosperity was not to last and by the early 19th century the silk weaving industry was in crisis. Spitalfields continued to be a destination for each new wave of immigrants and was increasingly subject to overcrowding and poverty. The decline of the area was to continue right up until the 1960s, when the tide began to turn. In 1976, the historic core of Spitalfields was designated a Conservation Area and the process of regeneration began.

In 1984, No. 13 was bought by Peter Lerwill, who became a loyal supporter of Landmark's work and who in due course asked if we would accept the building as a bequest. The house was a wreck when Peter Lerwill found it, but it still had its 18th-century floor plan and most of its original joinery. Together with architect Julian Harrap, Peter began a careful three-year restoration programme. Roof and ceilings were replaced, new wiring, central heating and windows introduced, the rear wall was underpinned and largely rebuilt and a rear extension was demolished and a new one built to provide kitchen and bathroom. The work was done as conservatively as possible, so that the joinery in particular retains its patina. Peter Lerwill enjoyed his house for some seventeen years before his death in 2004. When the house came to us, we needed to do little more than redecorate it and thanks to Peter Lerwill's great generosity, a succession of Landmarkers now share the experience of living for a while in this extraordinary part of London, part of the city yet distinct from it.

1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPITALFIELDS

Note: The very earliest references call Princelet Street Princess Street, but it soon became known as Princes Street. Only in 1891 did the name change to Princelet Street. The house known as No. 13 today was also numbered as No. 21 until 1921, when Booth Street was renamed to extend Princelet Street east of Brick Lane.

‘Have you any distinct idea of Spitalfields, dear reader? A general one, no doubt you have – an impression that there are certain squalid streets, lying like black trenches, far below the steeples, somewhere about London – towards the East End, perhaps, - where sallow, unshorn weavers, who have nothing to do, prowl languidly about, or lean against posts, or sit brooding on doorsteps, and occasionally assemble together in a crowd to petition Parliament or the Queen; after which there is a Drawing-Room, or a Court Ball, where all the great ladies wear dresses of Spitalfields manufacture; and then the weavers dine for a day or two, and so relapse into prowling about the streets, leaning against the posts, and brooding on doorsteps.’¹

So wrote Charles Dickens in 1851, in a characteristic piece of reportage. The passage instantly evokes the swirling fascination this part of London has inspired ever since it began to evolve into its present form in the late seventeenth century. Most recently, writers have detected a particular density of the layers of time in the area:

‘Just beyond the old market of Spitalfields archaeologists have discovered an area where the mediaeval hospital of St Mary Spital once stood. On this small spot were found the stone sarcophagus of a fourth-century Roman female; a fourteenth century charnel house and graveyard; a fifteenth-century gallery from which civic dignitaries listened to the ‘Spital sermon’; evidence of a sixteenth-century artillery ground; London fortifications of the seventeenth-century; eighteenth-century dwellings; and part of a nineteenth-century street. More will emerge in time, although time itself has a thicker and more clouded atmosphere in such a place. The levels of the centuries are all compact, revealing the historical density of London. Yet the ancient city and the modern city literally lie beside each other. That is one of the secrets of the city’s power.’²

In Dickens’ day, a once prosperous and cosmopolitan area was already in a decline from which it only recovered in the last decades of the twentieth century - his description would have been clearly recognisable even to readers in the 1960s.

¹ Charles Dickens, ‘Spitalfields’, *Household Words*, No 54 (April 1851).

² Peter Ackroyd, *London: the Biography* (2001), p 778. St. Mary Spital was excavated in the 1980s and a number of its early mediaeval bricks salvaged. Peter Lerwill bought enough to block the left hand window in the wall at the back of the yard at No. 13 – another example of the interweaving of past and present in the area.

Tower Hamlets, a name synonymous today both with the issues of inner city life and progressive policies to solve them, also has long roots. 'The Tower Hamlets' was the regular title for East London from the early 18th century. In the 16th and 17th centuries there were 21 hamlets in the five parishes of Bromley, Hackney, Shoreditch, Stepney and Whitechapel (Spitalfields does not appear on early lists because it did not exist as a separate hamlet until the late 17th century). The name 'Tower Hamlets' first arose because the Lieutenant of the Tower of London exacted guard duty from men living in the hamlets of East London and probably goes back as long as such duties were performed, at least to the late Middle Ages. In the Civil War years, it was used for the district militia, later passed into use as a civil division and, in the 20th century, gave its name to the borough formed within the Greater London Council which continues today.

In the early eighteenth century, however, when Princes/let Street was built, Spitalfields was a pleasant and semi-rural area. Daniel Defoe remembered it in his childhood in the late seventeenth century: 'the lanes were deep, dirty and unfrequented, the part now called Spittle-fields-market was a field of grass with cows on it... Brick Lane, which is now a well-paved street, was a deep dirty road frequented by carts fetching bricks that way into Whitechapel from brick-kilns in those fields.'

According to John Stowe in 1598, the name Spitalfields came from a 'ho-spital' for the needy called 'Domus Dei or St. Marie Spittle, without Bishopsgate of London: a house of such relief to the needy, that there was found at the surrender thereof [to Henry VIII during the Dissolution of the Monasteries], nine score beds, well furnished for the receipt of poor people.' It was founded in 1197 by Walter Brune, citizen of London and his wife Rosia. Spitalfields' position outside the city walls, through which Bishopsgate represented an eastern entrance, is key to understanding its development.

Rights of work and residency in the City of London were tightly controlled by the livery companies and trade guilds right through until the eighteenth century. A community within easy reach of the trading and financial opportunities offered by the city was therefore very attractive to those barred from more intimate links, especially foreigners and traders, and there had been a settlement of friendly and adventurous foreigners immediately outside the eastern wall of London from very early on. The Bishop's Gate was maintained from the 13th to 16th centuries by the privileged merchants of the

Hanseatic League, who used it as the entry point for their goods brought from the ports of north and eastern Europe. The foreigners who lived just outside the walls catered for the needs of the merchants and their servants and started small industries of their own. After the St Bartholomew Day massacre of French Protestants in Paris in 1572, Spitalfields became well-known as an enclave of French refugees from religious persecution. They were known as Huguenots and welcomed by Elizabeth I's Protestant regime. By 1598, in the first edition of Stowe's *Survey of London*, we can already read of this Gallic influence in the passage about Bishop's Gate Ward:

'Now without this Churchyearde wall [of St Botolph's without Bishopsgate] is a causeye leading to a quadrant called Petty France, of Frenchmen dwelling there, and to other dwelling houses lately builded on the banke of the saide [town] ditch by some Cittizens of London, that more regarded their owne priuate gaine, than the common good of the Cittie: for by means of this causeye raysed on the bank, and soylage of houses, with other filthinesse cast into the ditch, the same is now forced to a narrow channell, and almost filled up with vnsauorie thinges, to the daunger of empoysoning the whole Cittie.'

Many of these French Protestants had fled from southern France, especially the areas around Tours and Lyons, which were centres of excellence for silk weaving. Their skills were highly mobile. By 1598, they had already been joined by large numbers of Dutch Protestants, refugees from the Spanish persecution of the Netherlands. This had culminated in the infamous sack of Antwerp by the Spanish in 1585, when it was estimated that a third of the merchants and manufacturers of that city fled to England. Many of these too were skilled weavers of the patterned silks known as damask.

By 1629, the silk industry had already become so established in Spitalfields that an incorporation (or guild) of silk workers was formed there. But it was not until 1685 that the greatest influx of Huguenots began. The Edict of Nantes had been published in 1599, in an attempt to heal the wounds created by the Bartholomew's Day Massacre and allowed all French subjects comparative liberty of conscience and freedom of religious worship. Under such conditions, the art of silk weaving flourished in France, reaching a new pinnacle during the 17th century. However, in 1685, the Edict of Nantes was revoked. Vigorous persecution followed, in an attempt to convert all Protestants to Catholicism. Various edicts sought to prevent emigration too, but many Huguenots escaped at great personal risk from France and again sought refuge in Protestant countries.

Within just two years after 1685, it has been estimated that as many as 100,000 immigrants had arrived in England, many destitute, landing from open boats along the south coast. Many were skilled craftsmen in a wide range of industries – silversmiths, jewellers, clockmakers – but the greatest number were silk weavers from Lyons and Tours, who settled in Spitalfields, Folgate and along the western borders of Bethnal Green. London was still in the period of reconstruction in the wake of the Great Fire in 1666 and the incomers were accommodated with no great difficulty.

Within a very short space of time, a network of streets and alleys sprang up across the open ground just outside the city wall at Bishopsgate, houses built specially to meet the living and working requirements of the weavers, embroiderers, dyers, throwsters and other craftsmen. The street names still bear witness to their skills and French origins – Fleur de Lys Street, Rose Street, Blossom Street, Petticoat Lane, Fashion Street, Fournier Street. As fame of the Spitalfields weavers grew, other families, many of Huguenot origin too, came from other parts of the country – Canterbury, York, Cumberland. By the late 18th century, when the silk industry was at the height of its prosperity, up to 15,000 looms were in use in Spitalfields, the industry supporting perhaps 40,000 workers. These looms were often grouped together in the ownership of a master weaver, although most were still operated in attic rooms or the homes of individual craftsmen.

For most of the 18th century, the setting for this craft remained semi-rural. The weavers' houses spread into the countryside around, as yet little touched by the smoke and grime of industry. The weavers would have been in direct touch with private patrons as well as mercers and purchasers of every kind would have come into the area, the sedan chair frequently transporting a lady of quality to order her dress-length of brocade or figured silk direct from her favourite weaver.

However, the life of a refugee could be uncertain and by 1732 the parish already contained a charity school for 30 boys and 30 girls, an almshouse and a workhouse in Bell Lane 'wherein the Poor are employ'd and maintained, who are in Number about 120, and their chief Work is winding of Silk for Throwsters.'³ The same source also tells us 'there was a Market-house, but having been consumed a few years since by Fire, Stalls

³ Company of Parish Clerks New Remarks of London Or, a Survey of the Cities of London & Westminster, of Southwark, and part of Middlesex and Surrey (1732).

have been built all round the Market and in the Middle are sold *Greens, Roots &c.*' In fact, there had been a market since the thirteenth century in a field next to St Mary Spittel. In 1682, a silk thrower called John Balch had been granted a Royal Charter by Charles II, giving the right to hold a market in or near Spital Square on Thursdays and Saturdays.⁴

With true Protestant work ethic, the weavers were generally thrifty and hard working and indeed the institution of the Friendly Society, though with antecedents in the support network of the mediaeval guilds, came into existence at the direct instigation of the Huguenot weavers in 1703. The breeding and training of singing birds was one of the weavers' hobbies and their singing was the noise that struck Englishmen most when they wandered in the quarter, satirised here in 1709 (not everyone was able to welcome their fellow Protestants with entirely open arms):

Canary-Birds Naturaliz'd In Utopia: A Canto:

Here they grew fat, and liv'd at Ease,
And bigger look'd than Refugees;
Kindly protected from the Stroke
Of swift persuing gallick Hawk.
Them we so well did entertain,
They would not choose go Home again,
But now at last so sawcy grew,
That to aspiring Heights they flew:
They must be topping Masters made,
And, as our free-born Subjects, trade.

Most welcomed the refugees however, recognising the contribution they made to England's economy. John Strype, in the 1754 edition of Stowe's *Survey*, was able to report that Spitalfields was:

'a great Harbour for poor Protestant Strangers, Walloons and French, who as in former Days, so of later, have been forced to become Exiles from their own Country for their Religion and for the avoiding cruel Persecution. Here they have

⁴ The market thrived for the next two hundred years, supplying the ever increasing population with fruit and vegetables from a collection of shed and stalls and eventually trading six days a week. By 1876, Robert Horner, a former market porter, had bought a short lease on the market and began work on the new market building. It was completed in 1893 at a cost of £80,000. In 1920, the Corporation of London took direct control of the market and extended it. It thrived for another sixty years before the congestion it generated proved too much for the narrow streets around it. In 1991, the old fruit and vegetable market moved out to a new site in Leyton, larger and better served with modern roads. Robert Horner's market became the eclectic collection of traders it is today, although at the time of writing another battle for the site is being waged between conservationists and developers.

found quiet and security, and settled themselves in their several Trades and Occupations; Weavers especially. Whereby God's Blessing surely is not only brought upon the Parish (*Come ye Blessed of My Father &c. For I was a Stranger and ye took me in*), but also a great advantage hath accrued to the whole Nation, by the rich Manufactures of Weaving Silks and Stuffs and Camlets: which Art they brought along with them. And this Benefit also to the Neighbourhood that these Strangers may serve as patterns of Thrift, Honesty, Industry and Sobriety as well.' (p146)

People also remarked that however poor and hard-worked these strangers might be, they arranged and decorated their homes with a refinement of taste seldom seen in the homes of English craftsmen.



William Hogarth's *Noon* (1738) contrasting the godly Huguenots emerging from their worship in Soho with the more slatternly native citizens.

Such rapidly growing areas of population led to concern that their spiritual welfare was not being adequately cared for and this concern was responsible for the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches after the Act of 1711. The first Tory government for a generation was newly elected and this was a chance for the Anglican High Churchmen to re-assert themselves. The construction was to be funded by a tax of 2s and later 3s per chalders on all 'coals and culms brought in to the Port of London,' an expedient already used to rebuild St Paul's and the City churches after the Great Fire. In the event only twelve new churches were built, but one of them was Christ Church, Spitalfields, designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and built between 1714 and 1729. Mr Edward Peck, silk dyer of Red Lion Street, laid the foundation stone in 1715. The Huguenots also built their own churches: today's Great Mosque on the corner of Fournier Street and Brick Lane was built as a Huguenot church in 1743, despite the existence of several others in the area.

The Methodists and Quakers too profited from the Protestant origins of many of those living in Spitalfields to become influential in the area. George Whitfield, famous itinerant Methodist preacher, preached to a large congregation at Christ Church on New Year's Eve 1739. He returned there in the following months and:

'at two in the afternoon read prayers and preached at Christ Church ... for the Orphan House. The congregation was not so large as might be expected, and that of the poorest sort, so that I began to doubt. But wherefore did I fear? For God enabled me to preach with great power, and £25 was collected, to our great surprise...'

Whitfield's comments reflect the fact that the area always contained the full range of economic conditions. Folgate Street, Spital Square and Princelet Street housed prosperity, the master weavers and merchants, but there were also many journeymen and poorer weavers in the area. Despite periods of hardship, the silk industry generally prospered in Spitalfields for first half of the 18th century, helped by protection, a growing export trade to America and the proximity of the main domestic market in the capital. However, this prosperity was not to last and, for a variety of reasons explained in more detail in the chapter on the silk industry below, by the end of the century the silk industry, and therefore Spitalfields, were lurching from one crisis to another.

In March 1807 the Vestry of Christ Church referred to 'the very peculiar circumstances' of the district, 'inhabited almost entirely by poor persons.' Workhouses and lodging houses became more and more crowded. William Hale, lobbying his MP, wrote that:

'the leading cause of that accumulation of extreme poverty which is to be found in this neighbourhood is the gradual removal of the more affluent people into other parishes, while their former dwellings here soon become divided or sub-divided into small lodgings, which are immediately occupied by an *accession* of casual poor; and these, by residence, apprenticeships and other causes, very soon gain permanent settlements in the parish.'⁵

The mid nineteenth century saw some improvement in living standards, but rebuilding did not keep pace with population growth so that poverty and destitution also grew, especially with the influx from Ireland after the potato famine in the 1840s. Each new group of immigrants inherited the problems at the bottom of the social scale, not creating but often aggravating the district's problems. Evidence given to the Handloom Weavers' Commission 1840s stated: 'Living in such wretched places, and insufficiently fed, the weavers of Spitalfield exhibit a physical condition marked by general feebleness and liability to disease.' The Commission could offer only blunt advice - 'Flee from the trade.'

Spitalfields became renowned as the refuge of the desperately poor, the criminal and the misfit. By the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish refugees were joining the community in increasing numbers as the pressure on housing increased still further in the area, described by its then Rector as 'a portion of London teeming with a population of poor Jews, criminals and unemployed, who are always on the verge of crime.'

By 1934, a newspaper article could report 'Old Spitalfields is disappearing now'. But the housing crisis persisted as immigrants from the Indian subcontinent became the latest foreigners to seek a home in the area, many bringing their own expertise in textiles and settling and establishing businesses especially along Brick Lane. (Today, this bustling and largely thriving area is officially known as Banglatown. No. 19 Princelet Street, a house adapted in the nineteenth century into a synagogue at the rear, is now a Museum of Immigration, celebrating and reflecting upon the experiences of the many castes and nationalities that have found shelter in these streets.⁶)

By 1962, an article in the *Daily Telegraph* described Spitalfields as 'London's worst slum', blaming the poor conditions on prolonged policy drift.

⁵ Leech, K., The Decay of Spitalfields, in *East London Papers*, Vol. 7 No 2, Dec. 1964, p58.

'It is a district which has undergone the most acute social breakdown and has inherited and absorbed the problems of other districts and of many generations. The social history of Spitalfields in the last one hundred and fifty years is one of decay and deterioration.'⁷

Writing in 1964, Mr Leech, serving the community as a curate, could write 'Spitalfields' problems are nowhere near solution, but have created a crisis situation which is highly explosive.'

However, the 1960s were to prove the nadir of Spitalfields' fortunes. Perhaps largely because of the poverty of many of its inhabitants, much of the historic architecture of the area remained intact and its importance was already being recognised. In 1957, a ground-breaking study of the district was published as part of the Greater London Council's *Survey of London*.⁸

In 1969, Tower Hamlets designated Spitalfields a Conservation Area and by 1976 it was declared an Outstanding Conservation Area. In 1979 a Conservation Plan was produced for the area.⁹ The eighteenth-century core of the area (Fournier Street, Wilkes Street and Princelet Street) was singled out for particularly strict controls on development that encouraged the reversion of listed buildings to residential use and restricted parking. Today, the tranquillity of these streets is noticeable. The policy of demolishing Victorian or Georgian housing was reversed and grants were instead made available to restore older and more dilapidated dwellings. A Regeneration Project followed, which included the redevelopment of Spitalfields Market (1986). Numerous conservation battles against the forces of commercial development had led to the formation of the Spitalfields Historic Buildings Trust in 1977 and it remains one of the most active preservation trusts in the country. The regeneration process, though by now (2004) well advanced, continues. As

⁶ Today's No. 19 was built in 1718 for Pierre Abraham Ogier, weaver.

⁷ Ibid, p.57.

⁸ *The Survey of London* was initiated in 1894 by C R Ashbee, architect, designer and visionary, who initially lived and worked in Whitechapel. There, he initiated classes in art and craft skills for workmen, which developed into the School of Handicraft (1887) and then the Guild of Handicrafts (1888). In 1902 Ashbee uprooted the entire Guild to Chipping Campden. Sadly, the company went into voluntary liquidation in 1907 but its influence in the town persists today. F L Griggs, Guild member, restored the Almonry (now part of Landmark's site, Old Campden House) in the 1930s according to the philosophy of conservation promulgated by both Ashbee and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (whose own office is in Spital Square). In the same spirit, Ashbee's manifesto in founding *The Survey* was to discover and record and thereby help save historic buildings in London. The project continues today, 61 volumes later.

throughout the centuries, Spitalfields' proximity to the City has made it a popular area for those who work there. At the time of writing, Hawksmoor's Christ Church has also just reopened after a triumphant restoration. Peter Ackroyd, who cherishes a 'Gaia' thesis for London as a self-regenerating organism through all adversity, explains this process as

'The city, once more, ... being comforted and consolidated rather than destroyed...The Green Belt turned the City in on itself. The edges of Greater London were now so distant that Londoners began to reclaim those parts of the city closer to home. The city was solidifying; perhaps it was about to realise its potential.'¹⁰

And it was as part of this process that Peter Lerwill played his part, acquiring and restoring a dilapidated house at 13 Princelet Street in the 1980s and in which Landmark now participates by continuing his vision today. At all stages in its history, No.13 has both reflected and been representative of the forces that have played upon this area of London. After a brief look at how Spitalfields and East London developed through historic maps, the particular history of 13 Princelet Street and its inhabitants can be used to illustrate these forces in more detail.

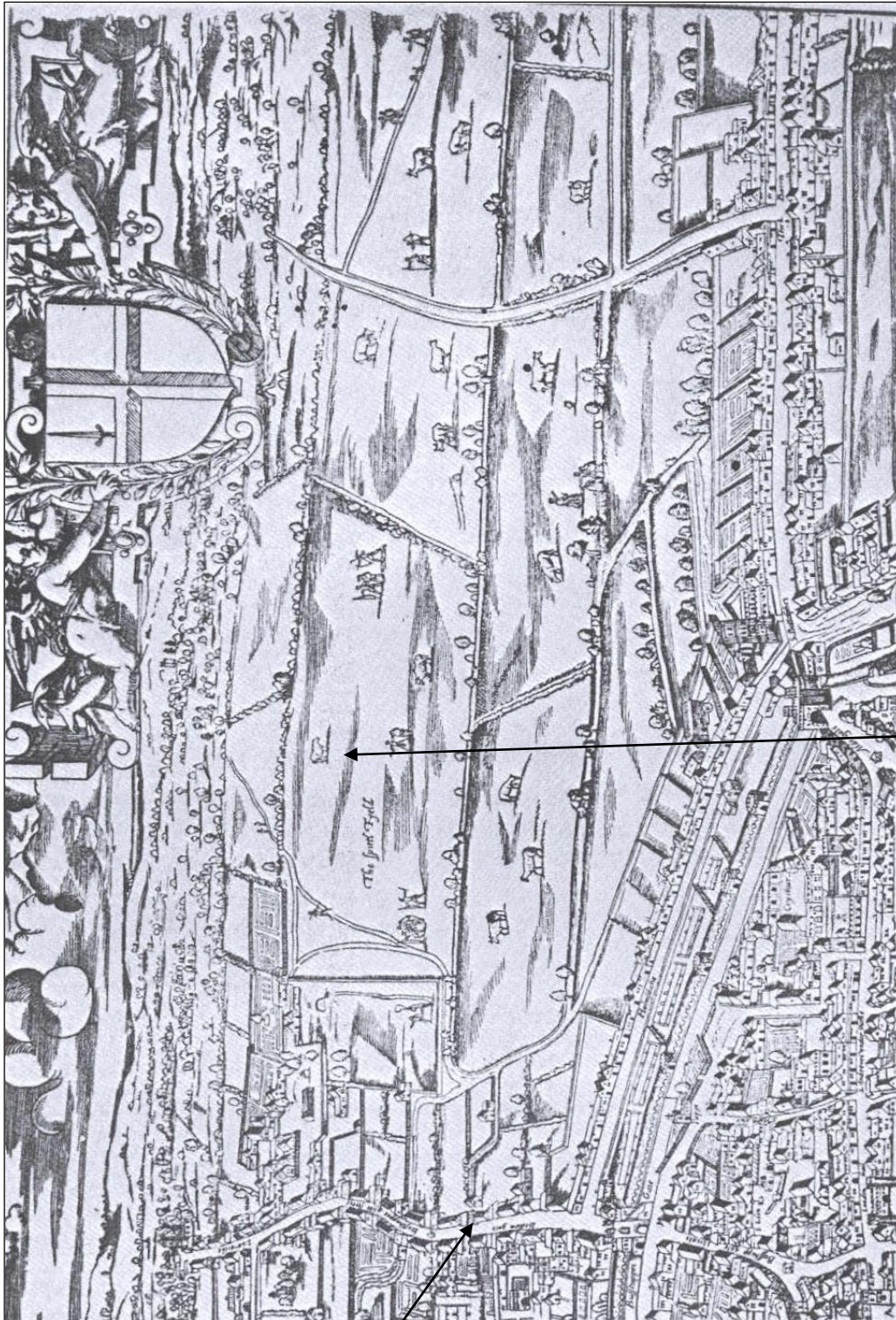
⁹ This document is included in the Reader Volume that accompanies this album, both as a snapshot of Spitalfields at this pivotal time and as a gazetteer of listed buildings in the streets around Princelet Street.

¹⁰ Peter Ackroyd, *London: the Biography*, p.763.

2. SPITALFIELDS THROUGH MAPS.

Extract from Agas's map, c. 1560-70. Shoreditch and Bishops Gate run down the left hand side. The area beyond it is entirely rural. 'The Spittel Fyeld' lies in the centre.

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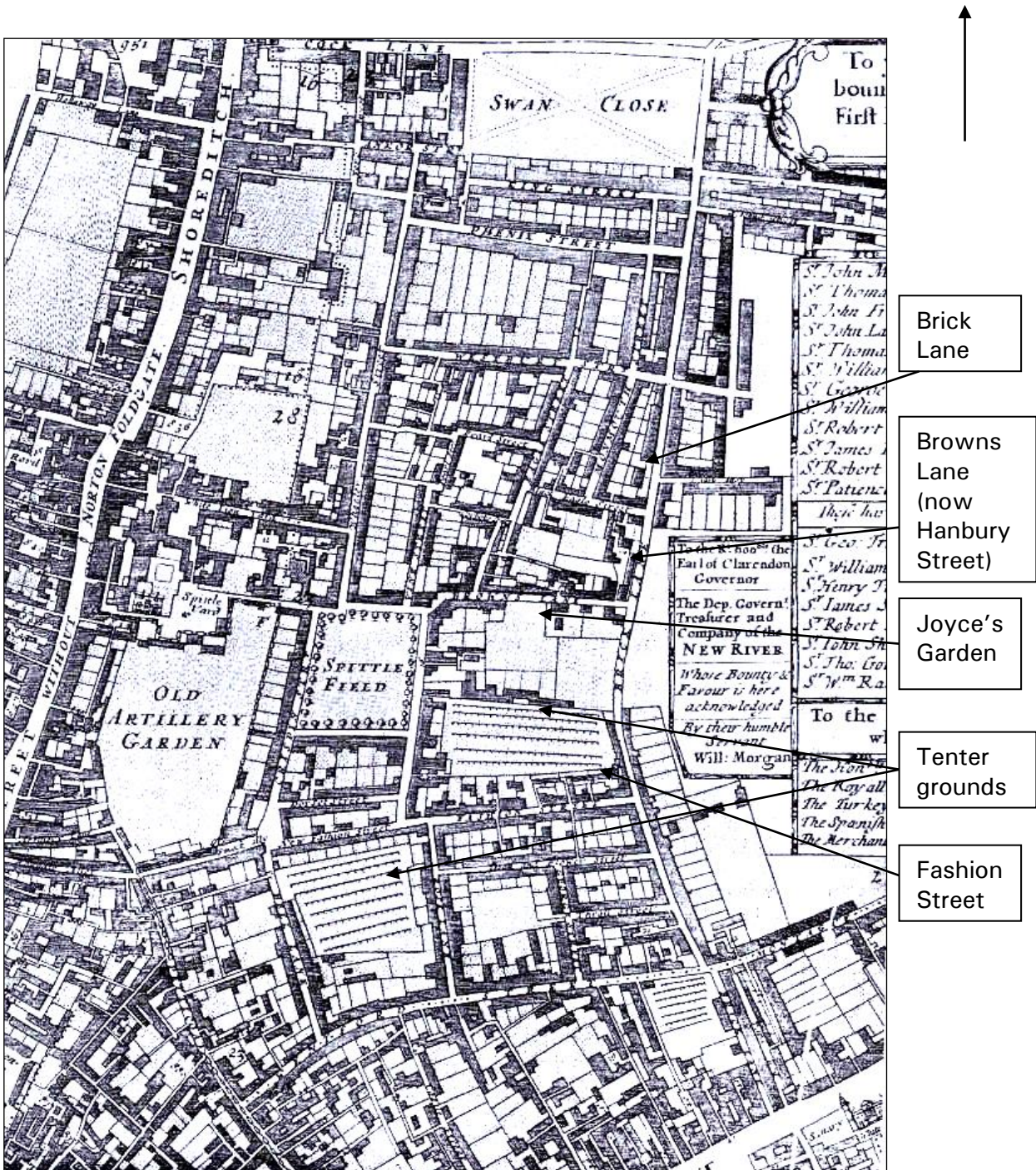


The Spittel Fyeld

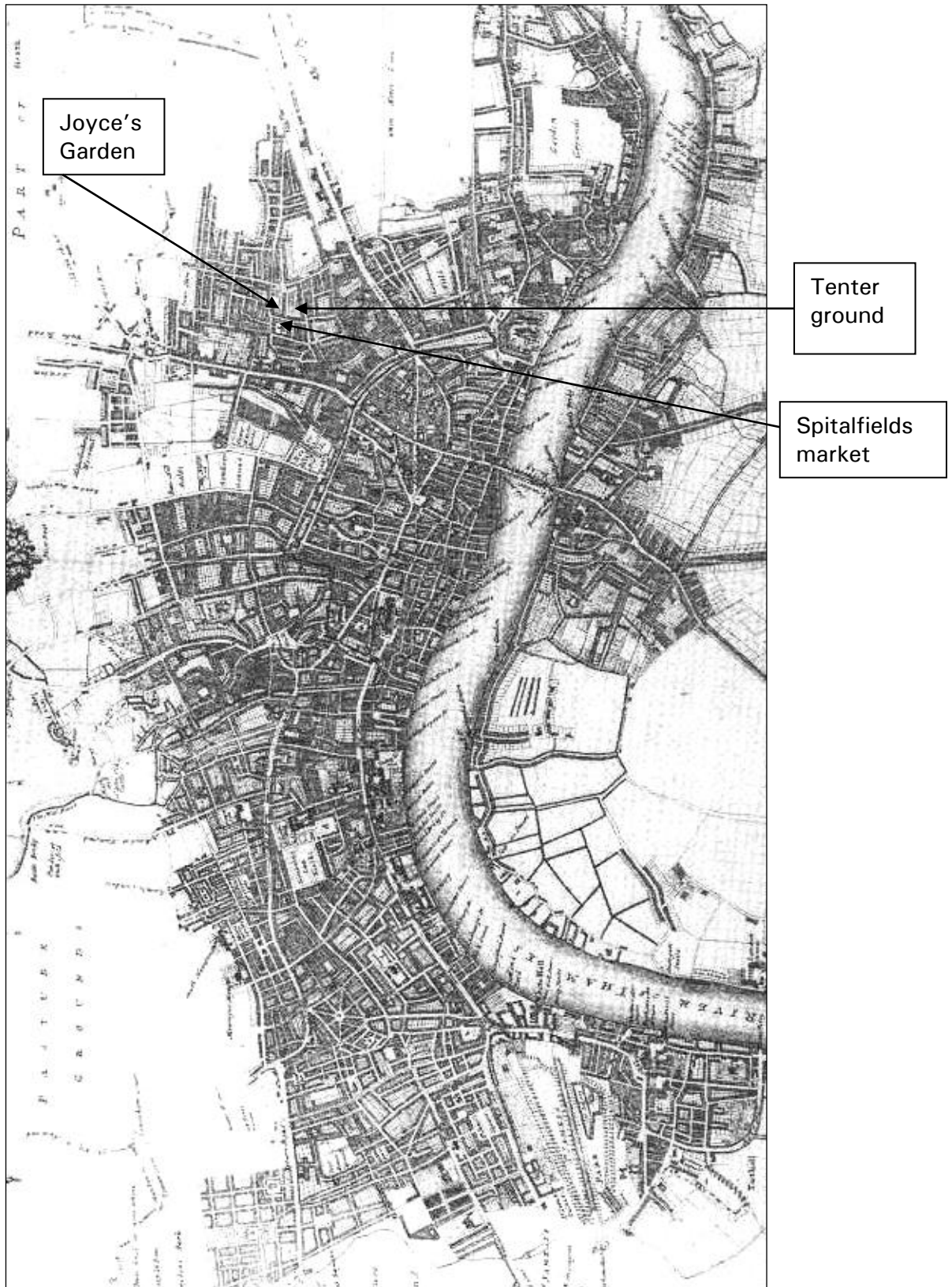
Bishops Gate

Extract from Ogilby and Morgan's map of 1681-2. Development has spread although Brick Lane still represents a boundary of sorts. Note the two 'tenter grounds,' used for spreading cloths to dry and shown here with rows of drying racks (and hence 'to be on tenterhooks'!). The more northerly was to become the site of Christ Church. The area between it and Browns Lane (now known as Hanbury Street) is Joyce's Garden, later to be the site of Princes/let Street. Spittle Field, site of the market today, has apparently been encroached upon but remains an open space, as does the Old Artillery Ground. New street names, like Fashion Street, already reflect the character of the developing district.

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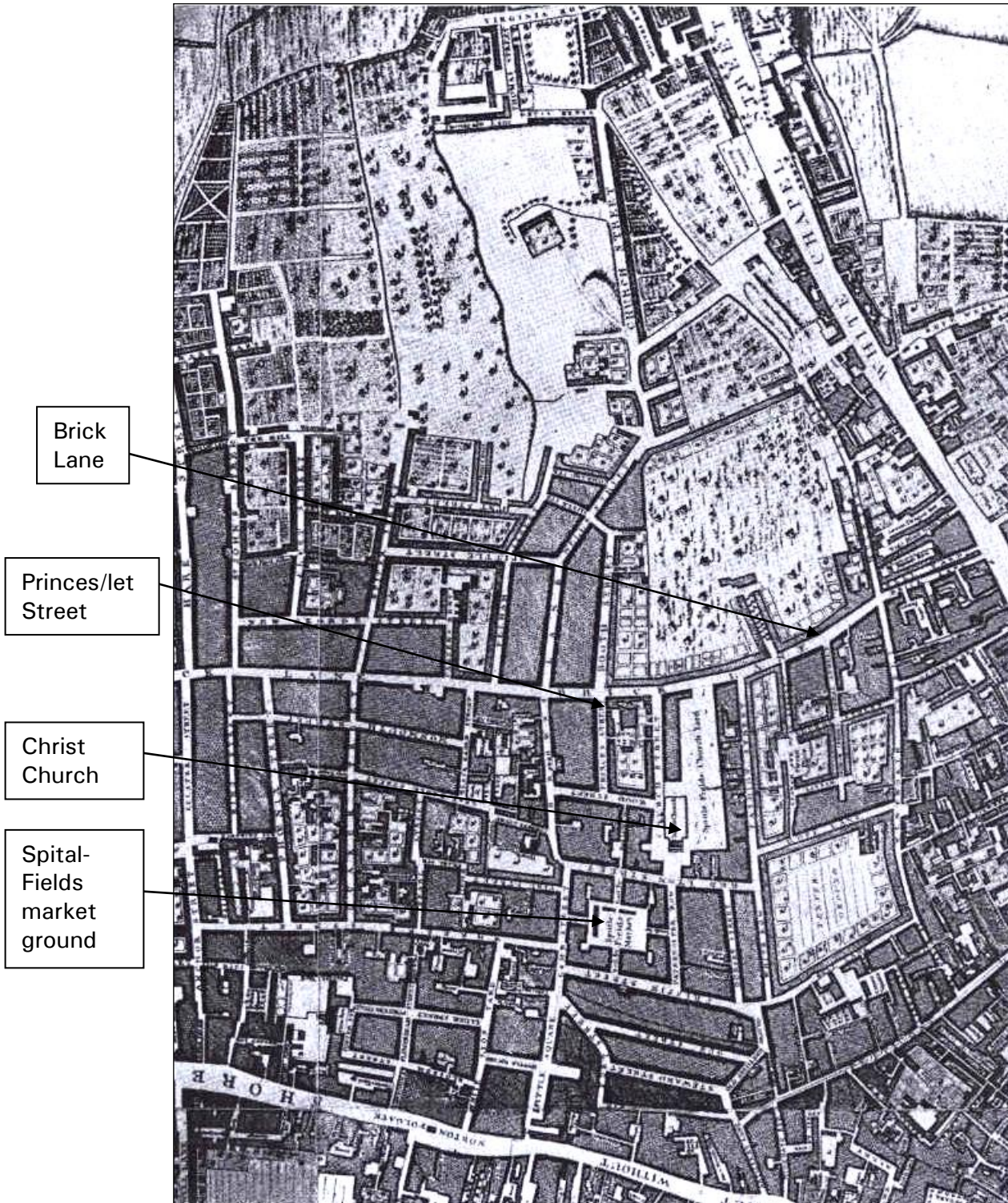


The frontispiece to John Strype's updated edition of Stow's *Survey of London*, 1720, showing the extent of the whole of London at the time Princes/let Street was being built. The greatest area of growth at this time was to the west and north west, on the great aristocratic estates such as the Hanover Square development and the new Harley-Cavendish estate north of the Oxford Road. There are also new buildings in Bloomsbury and Hoxton. Christ Church and Princes/let Street, both still under construction, do not appear to be shown.

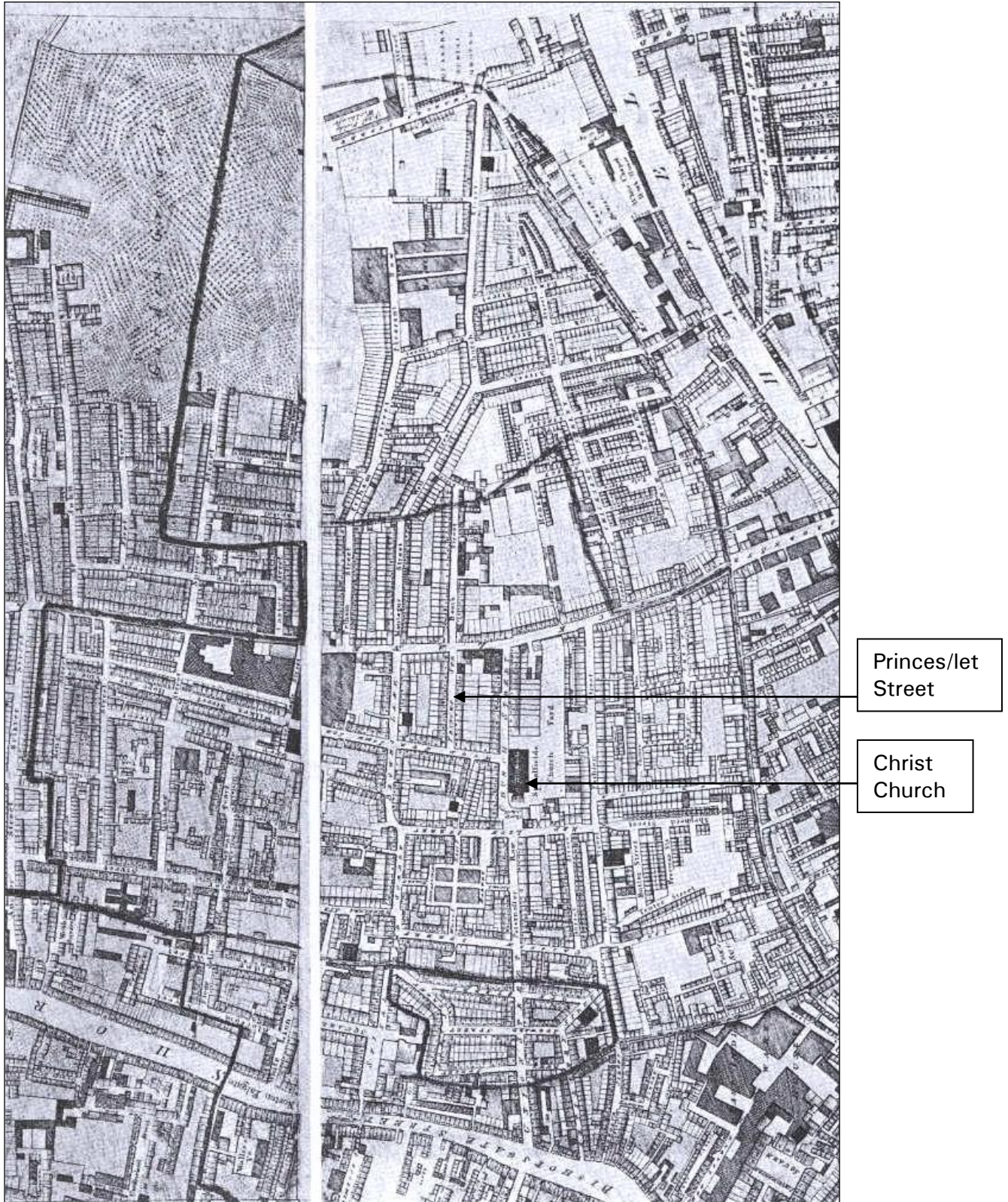


John Roque's Map of London, 1746. By now development has become much denser, although the Tenter Ground still survives as an open space. Christ Church has been completed. Joyce's Garden has been built upon although there are still gardens between Church Street and Princes/let Street. Development creeps eastward and the Old Artillery Ground has been filled with housing.

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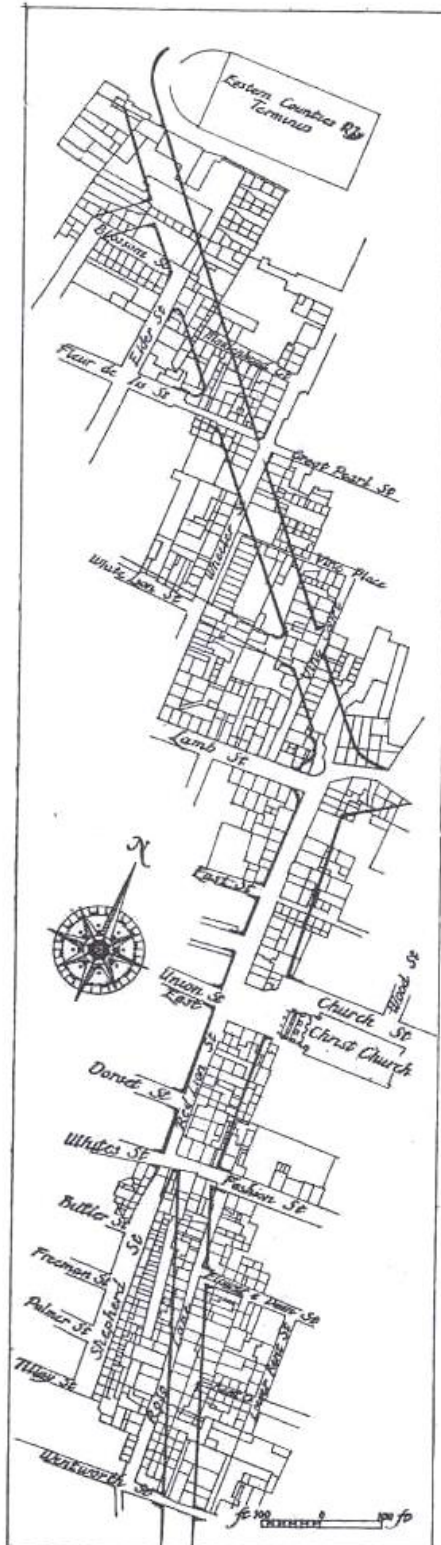
Extract from Horwood's map of 1819. By now the fields beyond Brick Lane have been largely developed and the last tenter ground all but filled in. There is still an open space between the houses on Princes/let Street and Brown's Lane.



During the 19th century, the desirability of a direct link between Whitechapel and Bishopsgate became increasingly apparent, to provide a direct link to the Docks.

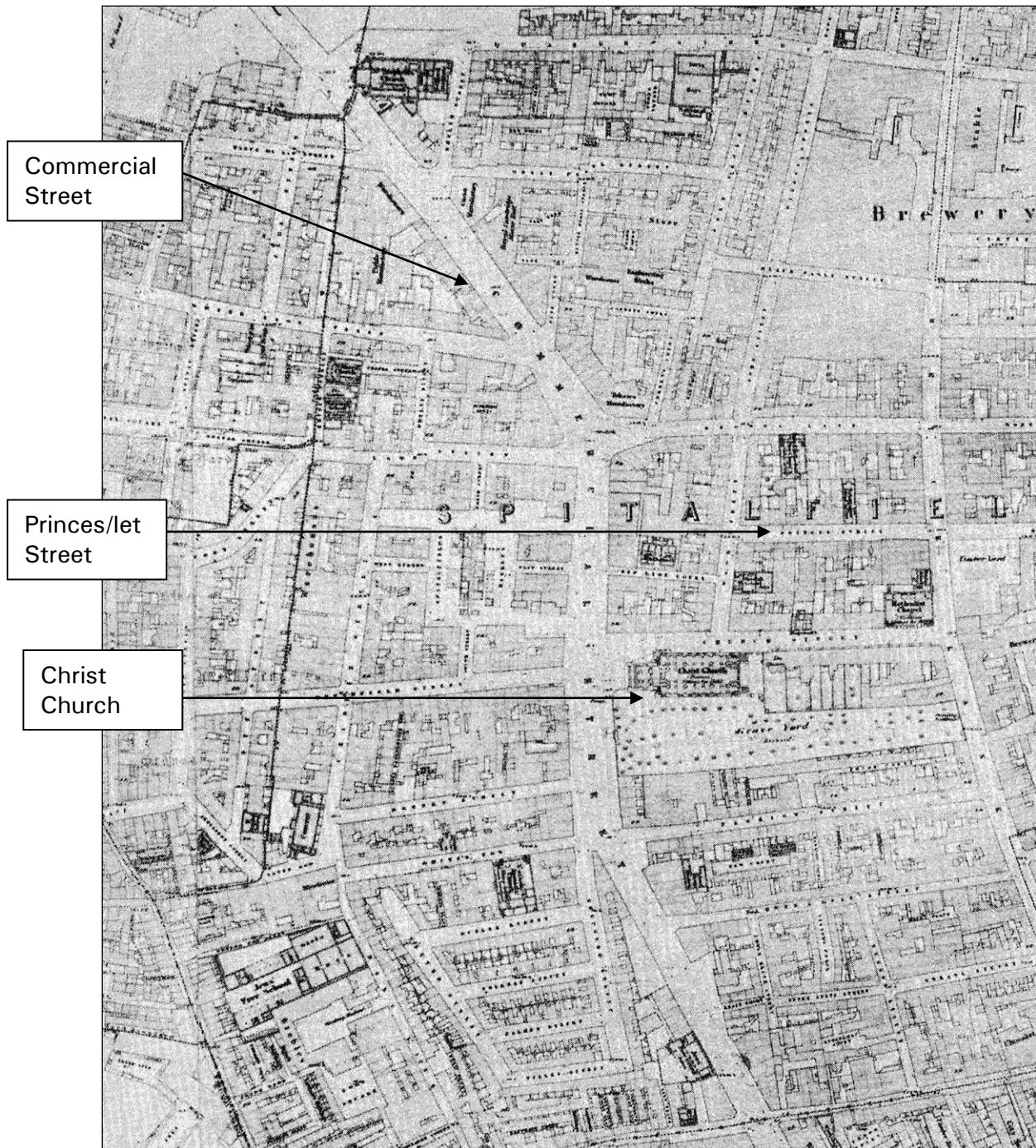
There was inevitably much debate about the best route, as any scheme would involve the demolition of many houses. The eventual route cut a swathe through the crowded streets, directly in front of Christ Church and was named Commercial Street. The next map, the Ordnance Survey map of 1873-5, shows the dominance of the new highway, even in poor reproduction.

Ordnance Survey map, 1873-5.



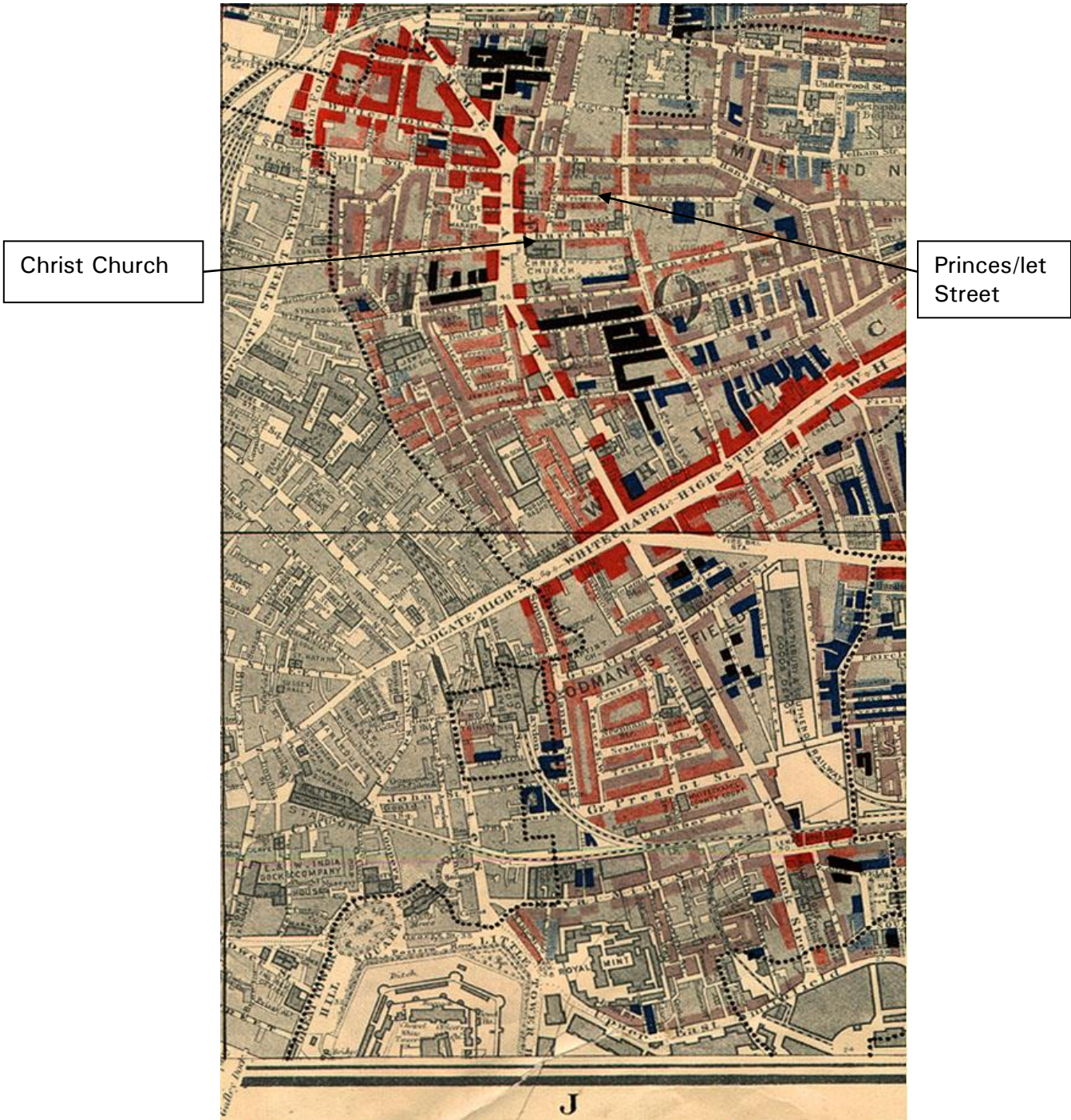
Layout plan for Commercial Street superimposed over the previous street plan, much of which had to be demolished.

The section of Commercial Street between Whitechapel High Street and Christ Church was constructed 1843-5, and that from the church to Shoreditch High Street laid out 1849-57. There was much discussion over the route. As well as providing a main thoroughfare between the City, Spitalfields market and London Docks, it also offered an opportunity to improve sanitation and police the unsavoury warren of 17th-century streets and later courts in the area, 'a neighbourhood inhabited by persons addicted to vices and immorality of the worst kind.'



In 1899, Charles Booth drew up a street-by-street Map of Poverty for London. The streets coloured black immediately south of Christ Church represent a pocket of the worst deprivation ('Lowest class, vicious, semi-criminal') while Princelet Street still clings to respectability ('Fairly comfortable, good ordinary earnings').

Map extract c. Sabiha Ahmad July 1999 www.umich.edu



The Streets are coloured according to the general condition of the inhabitants, as under:-

 Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.	 Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.
 Very poor, casual. Chronic want.	 Middle-class. Well-to-do.
 Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family.	 Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.
 Mixed. Some comfortable, others poor.	

A combination of colours— as dark blue and black, or pink and red— indicates that the street contains a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours.

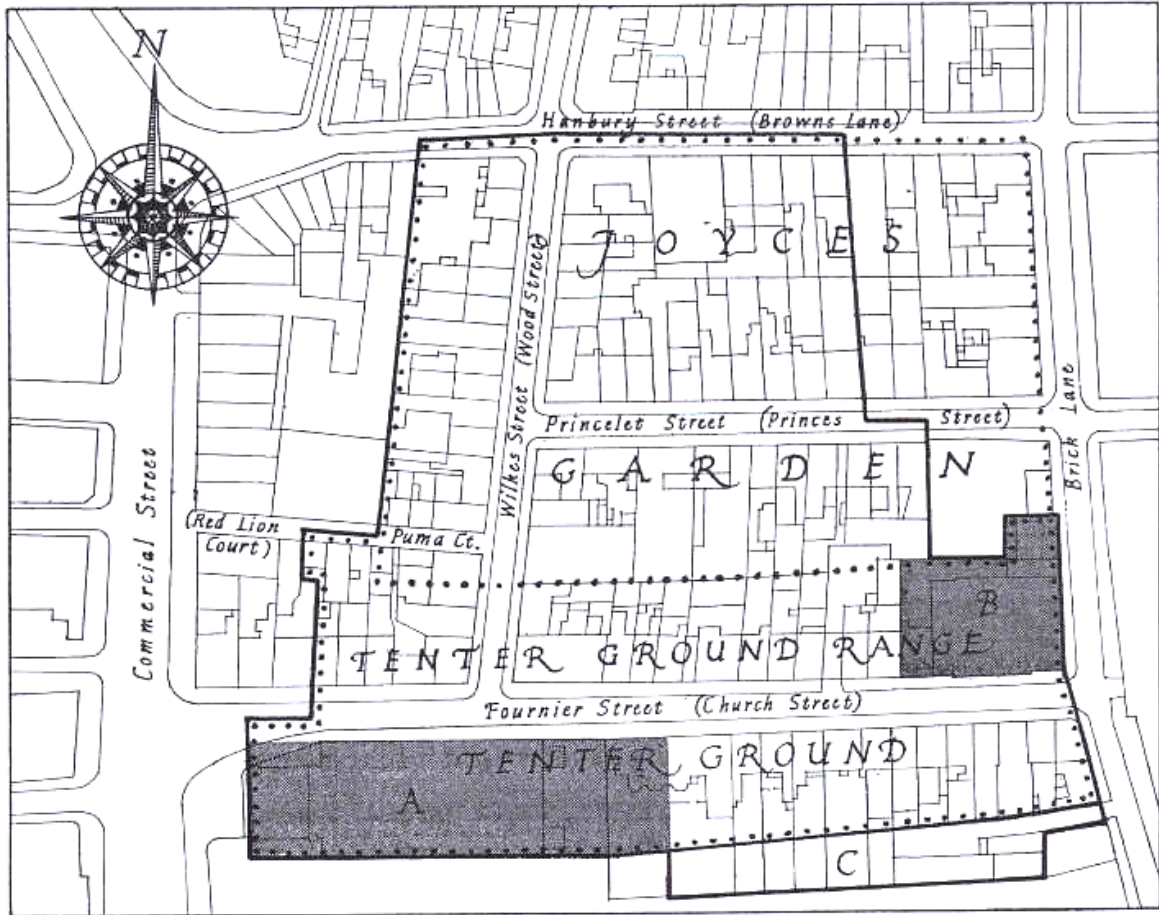


Fig. 40. The Wood-Michell estate, lay-out plan. Based on the Ordnance Survey 1873-5
 A. Sold to 'Fifty Churches' Commissioners, 1713
 B. Sold to Anne Fowle by 1714/15
 C. Acquired by Simon Michell, 1728

map

From *The Survey of London*

3. THE RESIDENTS OF 13 PRINCELET STREET

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS

Peter Lerwill commissioned historian Nick Barratt to investigate who had lived at Princelet Street through the years. Here is a summary of his findings, drawn from the Survey of London, leases, censuses (which allow residents to be identified) and Land Tax returns (which allow owners to be identified).

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
1718	Messrs Charles Wood and Simon Mitchell begin to grant leases on the piece of land known as Joyce's Garden (see opposite) which they had been acquiring piecemeal since 1708. Little is known about them: their fathers both hailed from Somerset and both were admitted to Lincoln's Inn. Both improved their fortunes and took an active part in local affairs, and seem to be typical representatives of a new breed of entrepreneurs who set out to profit from land and building. Mr Mitchell made himself very unpopular with the local community in Clerkenwell, where he later served as magistrate, despite his generosity to St John's Church. Wood and Mitchell had enlisted the services of Samuel Worrall to build on their Spitalfields estate the previous year. The first houses to be built were today's Nos. 9-19 in the street they called Princes/se Street, together with the houses on the south side of Hanbury Street (onto which they back). Today's No. 13 was then No. 21. Samuel Worrall was a carpenter and builder who lived and worked in a house between Princelet and Fournier Street all his life (or at least until 1759). He was probably the main contractor on the Wood Mitchell estate, also serving as overseer of the poor and churchwarden. He must have been firm in his Protestant beliefs, for in 1745 he was to provide seven 'workmen in arms' to resist the Young Pretender. ¹¹
Jan 1719	According to an assignment for No. 20, the adjacent No. 21 (today's No. 13) was then 'in building' by Edward Buckingham , a mason of St Clement Danes. Building must therefore have started in 1718, making No. 21/13 one of the oldest buildings on the estate. Buckingham is unusual as lead craftsman in being a mason, since bricklayers and carpenters were far more typical in speculative building.
June 1719	Indenture of a 60 year lease drawn up between Wood/Mitchell and Buckingham for No. 21 when it was already partly erected (entered on the Middlesex Land Registry in 1724).
June 1728	After the death of Edward Buckingham, his son Jeremiah (also a mason at

¹¹ Other Spitalfields residents, English and Huguenot, provided men to defend their Protestant faith against this last attempt by Catholic Bonnie Prince Charlie to capture the throne. In the event, the Londoners were never called upon to fight as the Jacobite army turned back near Derby, only to be pursued north and finally routed on Culloden Moor by the English army.

- St Clement Danes) demised the lease to Edward Armorer (a tailor), although the house was being occupied by **Godfrey Smith**. Armorer was to hold the lease for the remainder of the original term of 60 years while Jeremiah lived.
- Dec 1728 A further lease shows that Edward Buckingham had in fact left the house to his grandson Edward (son of Jeremiah) and so Edward jnr assigned the house to Armourer after the death of Jeremiah for the rest of the 60 year term.
- 1743-4 **John Bowyer** is the presumed owner (Land Tax returns)
- 1745-58 **John L'Amy** is the presumed resident (and first explicitly French surname associated with the house) though may also have occupied No 11.
- 1759-61 **John Durade** is the presumed owner. (A Mary Durade, who died at the age of 63 in 1793, was buried at Christ Church).
- 1762-71 **Alexander Christie** is the presumed owner.
- 1772-6 **William Cloutman** is the presumed owner.
- 1783 Trade directory shows **Ward & Son**, silk weavers, are in residence. (In 1779 the original 60 year lease on the land fell in. It has not been possible to date to trace the exact course of the tenure).
- 1784-90 Land tax and trade directories confirm **Andrew Allard**, weaver, is living in the house.
- 1791-97 Land tax and trade directories confirm that **Anthony Allard**, weaver, lives in the house.
- 1798-1804 **John Quinton Lebez**, silk weaver, is living in the house.
- 1805-11 Presumed owner a Mr Lum (Land Tax assessment).
- 1812 Presumed owner Mr Jeffries. The Rate Book suggests that, like today's No. 15, the house was substantially renovated shortly before 1812, perhaps re-faced. As early developers tended to specify their buildings to reflect the life of the lease, so that the plot could be redeveloped after the initial lease, such a refurbishment could perhaps also reflect the expiry of the initial 60 year lease in 1779.
- 1815-22 **John Daussey jnr**, silk manufacturer is living in the house. The term 'manufacturer' suggests that Mr Daussey was an employer of weavers rather than one himself. By now the Spitalfields silk industry was in serious decline.

- 1841 From this year, at ten yearly intervals, censuses provide more detailed records of inhabitants. In 1841 **John Garwood**, clergyman, was living at No. 13 with his family, and they were presumably subletting a room or rooms to **Eliza Cuthbert** and **Mary Bunce** (both fruit sellers, presumably at Spitalfields market).
- 1851 **Hugh Allen**, curate, resident with his family and servants.
- 1861 By now the house has become multi-occupancy, lived in by widow, **Rachel Bonnington**, a mangler, and her four young children, and **John Karen** (poulterer – where did he keep his chickens?) and his wife and adult daughter and son (a dock labourer).
- 1871 As the decline of the area accelerates, the house now shelters four families on census night (although it might just have been a party!): elderly **Joseph Emmanuel** (collector) and wife, both 71; **Aaron Decosta** (traveller) and wife; **Nathaniel Nathan** (engraver) and family and **Ellen Isaacs** (furrier) and daughter Zephorah.
- 1872-3 Mr Smallwood is the owner of the house, which is still occupied by J Emmanuel.
- 1881 In residence are **Mordecai Da Costa** (dealer) and family and mother-in-law **Mrs Barker**; **Henry Guttenburg** (jeweller) and wife and two baby children are all in residence. Guttenburg is the only resident recorded by the census who gives his place of birth outside Britain (in Austria).
- 1886-7 Mr M P Leschalles is now the owner, the house being occupied by **C Posner** (whose residency seems at odds with the census evidence).
- 1891 **Henry Guttenberg** (jeweller) and his family are still in residence. Henry is now 34, his wife 30, but they already have six children aged between 11 and 2 years old. No wonder they also employ a servant girl. **Benjamin Levy** (boot clicker) and his wife sublet two rooms in the house.
- 1894-1903 Land Tax again has the house owned by Mr Laschalles and occupied by C Posner.
- 1910-22 Still owned by Mr Laschalles but now lived in by **H M Young**. Likely that the current re-facing of the front elevation dates to the 1920s.
- 1984 Peter Lerwill buys No. 13 from Tarn Estates.

NOTES ON OTHER BUILDINGS IN PRINCELET STREET

(based on *Survey of London*, Vol. 27)

The first known designation of Princelet Street is as 'Princesses Street' in 1713, although by 1717/18 this had been contracted to Princes Street. Only in 1891 did it become Princelet Street, though it is not clear why.

The earliest houses in the street were probably the easternmost four, today Nos. 21-25, built 1705-6. Wood and Mitchell began their activity in summer 1718 and the south side of the street was largely complete by January 1723/4.

South side

- Nos 2 & 4 Nos 2 and 4 were the last of the original houses to be built. No. 2 was home to Anna Maria Garthwaite, perhaps the best known of the designers of Spitalfields silks. It has its original fenestration pattern (and the large windows must have help her design work) though was re- faced c.1860.
- No. 6 Built by 1720, but now rebuilt.
- Nos. 8 & 10 (opposite No. 13) Now rebuilt. In 1831 and 1846 in use as a police station.
- No. 12 Ground storey re-faced, upper two original. Garret storey entirely windowed. Note separate access to various garret storeys on the street.
- Nos. 14-24 (though No. 24 rebuilt). All except possibly No. 18 were built by Samuel Worrall, carpenter, under a 1721 lease. Worrall was behind many of the buildings in the area at this time.
 No. 16 was home in 1736 and 1750 to John Sabatier, silk weaver from one of the Lyon Huguenot families, and who worked closely with Anna Maria Garthwaite. Re-faced in the 1820s.
 No. 20 is the only one to preserve its original appearance (including its primary brick facing).
 No. 18 was occupied in 1723 and 1729 by Samuel Worrall, and John Roque's map of 1746 shows a timber yard behind the house, stretching to the churchyard. The front has been rebuilt, probably in the early 19th century.

North side

- Nos. 1-5 Built by Marmaduke Smith, who lived at No. 5 in 1724 and 1725.
 Nos. 3 & 5 were both occupied by clergy in 1743 and 1750. The street's proximity to churches, and later no doubt its tenacity in clinging to shabby respectability as the area declined, make clergy a consistent presence on the street through the 18th and 19th centuries.
 No.1 has been re-faced.
 Nos. 3 & 5 retain the original weather-boarded face to the garret.
- Nos. 9-19 Built under contracts for individual houses between 1718 and 1720.

Samuel Worrall had a 99 year lease on No. 9.

No. 11 has been rebuilt.

Nos. 13 and 15 perhaps re-faced early 19th century.

Nos. 17 and 19 are the only two which originally had a double frontage onto Hanbury Street. The Ogier family, Huguenots and silk weavers, lived at No. 19 initially. In 1869 a synagogue was built across the garden to the rear and today No. 19 is a Museum of Immigration & Diversity, an otherwise largely unaltered building of great patina and fragility. It was in the attic here that David Rodinsky, a reclusive scholar, lived until he disappeared in 1969. His room was not rediscovered until 1980, books open, a pot of porridge on the stove and the imprint of his head in the pillow.

Nos. 21-25 Built 1705-6.

5. PETER LERWILL

The last owner and occupant of 13 Princelet Street before it passed into Landmark's care was Peter Lerwill, a long time supporter of the Trust. Before his death in 2004, Mr Lerwill enjoyed almost twenty years in Spitalfields, an active supporter too of the Spitalfields Festival. On the following pages is summary of his life is adapted from the funeral address given by John Crisp, a friend of some thirty years, and a brief tribute from Judith Serota, Executive Director of the Spitalfields Festival.

Peter Lerwill Funeral Address St Michael's Cornhill 11 March 2004

'...forward planning was typical of the way Peter lived. Even when he was only 5 years old a tour of Lloyds bank in his home town of Barnstaple made him decide that he wanted to work in a bank. And this he did, in Westbury, when he left Barnstaple Grammar School at age 16 after deciding that there was no point in having further education, even if his parents could have afforded it. He stayed with Lloyds for the next 4 years, moving to Clevedon after 2 years, but he then gave up banking as he thought that he had spent too little time in the past with his parents and would now make up for this in Bristol where his father was running a butcher's shop. This was a sort of gap year.

'He then, as he said, drifted into insurance, joining the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company in Bristol, and this set him on his life's work journey. He soon became the Branch's Fire Surveyor, visiting farms, tanneries, woollen mills, aircraft factories etc often 100 miles away. In 1959 he married in the Lord Mayor's Chapel in Bristol with the Lord mayor present, quite an event at that time, but the marriage did not last.

'Peter had previously met the Insurance Manager of the Bristol Aeroplane Company at Filton and in 1962 he was asked by him to join the insurance team of the newly formed British Aircraft Corporation in London and for the next 14 years Peter was deeply involved in the joint Anglo-French Concorde programme. During this time BAC were also building the VC10, BA C 1-11, and military aircraft and guided weapon systems all requiring complicated insurance arrangements.

'Having seen Concorde into service Peter changed course in 1976 when he was asked to join The British National Oil Company as insurance manager under Sir Alastair Morton and stayed with them when they were privatised as Britoil under Sir Philip Shelbourne. In 1986, just before privatisation, Peter was asked to join British Airways and stayed with them for his final 10 working years as general manager Risk Assessment. He travelled widely, very often to New York always by Concorde. He became a recognised authority on Risk Assessment and was in great demand at conferences worldwide.

'Peter had developed a great love of country houses and architecture in general and decided to do some conservation. After living in Chiswick for 25 years, in 1984 he purchased a wreck in Spitalfields. It was however also a Grade II listed Georgian terrace house. After 3 long difficult years of rebuilding and restoration he moved into his exquisite gem of a house in 1988 and thereafter many groups were given his enthusiastic house tour. He was so pleased that he had saved a tiny part of our heritage and he loved living in it. He filled the house with period furniture and tried to buy only 1719 silver to correspond with the date of the house.

'He also had a great love of music, making regular visits to overseas festivals in Salzburg, Hohenems, Bayreuth, and most frequently Wexford. In this country Glyndebourne Festival, and above all Spitalfields Festival claimed his loving attention and support as did the Wigmore Hall.

'Peter really was rather a quiet, retiring person but somehow he always gravitated to centre stage in relation to associations with which he became involved. He was Chairman of Brentford and Chiswick Round Table, Chairman of the Association of Insurance and Risk Managers in Industry and Commerce, on the committee of Bridge Ward Club and President of the Aldgate Ward Club.

'In 2000 cancer was diagnosed and despite many treatments including two separate courses of radiotherapy it finally claimed him. Right from the start he told his surgeon that he had to keep him alive until 17 October 2003 so that he could complete his year as master of the Worshipful Company of Plumbers, one of the City of London's ancient livery companies. Peter rated this year as the apogee of his life and it would have broken his heart had he had to withdraw during it. Few knew how big a struggle it was for him to keep going towards the end but he made it. In this he was greatly helped by Mrs Sylvia Moys as Mistress Plumber and his Escort while Master.

'Peter was very proud of his North Devon heritage, both his parents came from large Devonian families. His father was the youngest of eleven and his mother had over 100 first cousins... He commissioned the Royal College of Arms to research a Pedigree of the family and he was able to trace his ancestry, with only a small gap, back to the thirteenth century.'

John Crisp



Peter Lerwill

**From programme notes for a Spitalfields Festival concert at on Friday
25th June 2004**

‘Peter Lerwill had hoped to be sitting in this refurbished Christ Church tonight to hear this performance of the *1610 Vespers*. When he committed to support this event in October last year, he was already seriously ill. Just weeks before he died on 26th February 2004, it became clear that tonight’s concert would not be held in Christ Church. I need not have been wary of asking Peter if he wanted to delay his support of this event until the Festival returned to Christ Church.¹² Although very weak, he had anticipated my question and made it absolutely clear that his support remained in place, even though the venue would now be Shoreditch Church..

‘Ever practical, Peter helped the Festival in many ways. When he retired he frequently volunteered as a steward, willingly helping out at short notice. Early one morning in October 2000, during one of our frequent breakfast meetings, he handed me a brown envelope. It contained a cheque for £5,000 for our New Music Commission Fund. With a twinkle in his eye, he said “Judith, if I do this, someone else will do it too.” He was right.

‘He regularly helped in other ways, particularly wishing to contribute to events that had found no other supporters. Discussions over breakfast were essential to plan his gifts to the Festival, whether he was refurbishing the “Peterloo” in the Festival office so that we had hot water, or for Festival parties in his lovingly restored house in Princelet Street. Always underlying Peter’s generosity was his belief that, used carefully, a little would go a long way.

‘Last October over yet another breakfast, Peter told me about his legacy to the Festival. It is a great honour for everyone involved in this Festival that Peter also remembered our work in his will, and we feel privileged to have known him. He was always there to offer help, advice and hospitality. I will always be grateful for this, and for the fact that he gave me the opportunity to thank him for his final generosity, which will be celebrated again, at his request, in a concert in 2005.’

Judith Serota, Executive Director Spitalfields

Festival

¹² Christ Church was undergoing a major restoration programme at the time.

6. SPECULATIVE BUILDING IN 18TH-CENTURY LONDON

As the comparison of the Hollar and Kip views overleaf make clear, London was transformed in the fifty years after the Great Fire in 1666. The most characteristic building type from 1680 until well into the nineteenth century was the speculative terrace house, of which 13 Princelet Street is an early example. (We should not forget however that houses had been built speculatively in rows or 'rents' for centuries in London – for example, the fairground at St Bartholomew, Smithfield, which was laid out for 175 new houses between 1598 and 1616. Their form belonged to an earlier era, though, being typically timber-framed, jetty-fronted, one-room-plan houses).

The land clearance in the City after the fire offered the chance for a more coherent grid plan there and Wren, Hooke and others proposed such a plan. In the event, this came to nothing and many streets were re-erected on their original mediaeval routes. Similarly, new development outside the city walls as in Spitalfields evolved around existing land divisions, sold piecemeal. Recent historians stress this continuity: the persistence of existing housing types and traditional layouts and older patterns and associations of land use. The 'London terrace house' emerges not as a revolutionary invention but as the product of an evolving interplay between tradition, the profit motive, legislation and fashion. Yet a recognisable and distinctive building style did emerge, as is clear in the Kip view of 1710, whose uniformity owes more to the overall consistency of individual buildings than to widespread and co-ordinated planning. Co-ordinated development of estates did occur, especially in the West End (where aristocratic owners set out to maximise the return on their land through careful and planned control of the building upon it and by retaining ultimate ownership of that land) but many more developments took place on much smaller land holdings.

Speculators typically began by building just a few houses. The best known and biggest late 17th-century speculator, Nicholas Barbon (son of the Puritan hero Praisegod Barbon who gave his name to the Barebones Parliament of 1653) began with just seven houses in 1674 on a piece of land from 'a good estate' in Mincing Lane. It was Barbon who developed the Old Artillery Ground in Spitalfields, which he bought from the Crown in 1682.

London in 1647: an extract from Wenceslaus Hollar's panorama of the City before the Great Fire. St Paul's Cathedral dominates a jumble of timber-framed house of bays, gables, steep roofs and mullioned windows.



Only sixty years later, the City had been transformed. This is an extract from John Kip's *Prospect of the City of London, Westminster and St. James's Park, 1710*. The city has become much more uniform, the devastation of the Fire affording the opportunity for planned streets, with brick and stone now the predominant building material. Rectangular blocking and shallow roofs have largely replaced the spiky gables of the earlier cityscape.



The new uniformity was directed partly by the Building Acts passed to prevent a disaster like the Great Fire ever occurring again:

1667 Act for the Rebuilding of London This only applied to the square mile of the City although its influence inevitably spread more widely. The Act insisted on outside or party walls being of stone or brick and specified the thickness of walls and scantlings for timber floors and roofs. It also introduced four standard categories of housing for different settings: fronting by-lanes; fronting the street, lanes of note and the Thames; fronting high and principal streets; and mansion houses.

1707 Building Act This Act prescribed stone or brick cornices and party wall parapets instead of wood. This meant the roof became half- hidden behind a parapet wall with a brick or stone cornice, reducing the impression of pitch.

1709 Building Act. Window-frames and doors were required to be set back four inches from the plane of the wall rather than flush. This coincidentally gave a greater impression of solidity to the walls. In the same years, the sash window, almost certainly an English invention, finally replaced the casement with its many leaded lights.

Yet the effect of the Building Acts should not be overstated. There was no effective means of enforcing them and the shape and size of the London house was always conditioned by the requirement to get as many houses as possible on one street. Economy of frontage meant also economy of road-making and sewers. Georgian London was a city made up almost entirely of tall narrow houses on long narrow plots – practically the whole population lived in one version or another of such houses.

The men who designed those houses were not polite architects, but bricklayers and carpenters, masons, glaziers and plumbers – it was even claimed that you could tell the trade of the master-builder of a given house by its appearance. The London craftsman was a man of considerable skill and status. A mason, bricklayer or carpenter would be perfectly capable of creating a plain 'draught' of a small building. At the beginning of the 18th century, there was also an emerging capitalist element, the 'master-builders' who would undertake the construction of entire houses for the speculative market. Under this scenario, business sense came first, skill and originality second.

For Wood and Mitchell on Joyce's Garden, their procedure would almost certainly have been to contract direct with the likes of Samuel Worrall, carpenter, and Edward Buckingham, mason, to build the houses, preparatory to offering a long lease. Typically, a (literal) peppercorn rent was paid for the first year or two, which also acted as an

incentive to finish the building work in this period. The master-builder would erect the carcass of the house – a brick shell with floors and roof – and offer it for sale. The planform was invariably one room at the front, one at the back and a passage and staircase to one side – little else was possible on a site as narrow as twenty four feet. The building technique, at least until the first decades of the eighteenth century, owed much to timber-framing skills; No. 13 is not unusual in having a timber skeleton buried in its walls. The story of such London houses is then one of ingenious variation within the inflexible limits of party walls, whose constraints were also responsible for the insistent verticality of the city, commented upon by foreigners at the time.

The speculative builder would then hope to find a purchaser or tenant before the peppercorn period expired, so avoiding outlay on ground rent. The builder thus got the use of the ground for nothing and typically carried out the building work by a kind of barter system under which the master-builders helped each other out in their individual trades. Often, the eventual purchaser of the house would finish and decorate it to his own standards for a lump sum, whether for himself or, as frequently, to rent on. In the case of No. 13, the mason Edward Buckingham apparently took on the lease for the building himself.

Anyone with a bit of spare capital could embark on speculative building, with the result that by mid-century, bricklayers and carpenters stood high in the bankruptcy lists through over-reaching themselves. Equally, individuals of quite modest means might amalgamate their capital to invest jointly in a house. At the Old Artillery Ground in the 1680s, for example, a building lease was taken by a William Sabine. To raise the money to build his house, he borrowed £100 from William Bower, a scrivener. The money in fact belonged to Anne Miller, who agreed to its use as a mortgage to Sabine. This intimate network of financial relationships seems to have been quite typical, providing a channel for the investment of small sums often from people in unrelated trades and also by women. We know that in 1728 at No. 13, after Buckingham's death, his son Jeremiah (also a mason) demised the lease to Edward Armorer (a tailor), who then had a Godfrey Smith as a tenant. In this respect too No. 13 is a typical example the chains of credit and sub-lettings that underpinned the development process.

Brick, Georgian London's native building material, was predominant in the new houses, made of local clay in hundreds of suburban brick fields. The quality ranged from good quality red or grey or, later, yellow 'stocks', used for external walls, to the worst 'place' bricks which were fired at the outside of the kiln and typically contained as much ash as clay. Ashes or 'Spanish' were added to reduce the amount of fuel needed to fire the bricks, as this comment from the Company of Bricklayers and Tilers in 1714 explains:

'the practice of using ashes commonly called Spanish in making brick begun about forty years since, occasioned by digging up several fields contiguous to the city after the great fire which fields having ben much dinged with ashes it was observed the bricks made with earth in those fields would be sufficiently burned with one half of the coles commonly used.'

The coarser place bricks were used for unseen work in party and partition walls – and therefore in supporting the floor joists were ironically placed under the greatest structural strain, while the strongest, stock bricks were being used for the non-load bearing fair facings. To make matters worse, brickwork was the subject of some of the greatest abuses of the speculative system. Instead of a true Flemish bond, in which fine face bricks are bonded back into place by the full depth of those bricks presenting as headers, the headers were often snapped in half so that the front, fair face of brickwork was only intermittently bonded into the place brick pier behind, typically every eighth course or so. It was found to be more economical to employ a workman to snap the headers than to pay for the additional bricks needed for a true bond. Batty Langley observed that

'For the sake of saving about 400 grey-stocks, whose value is not half a crown, Bricklayers will very often carry up the face of a building of a brick breadth only, for eight, ten, nay even twelve courses together before they bond in upon the place-bricks: so that, in fact, the whole wall, though of a brick and a half in thickness, is very little stronger than a one brick wall; because, between the grey-stock and the place-bricks, there is an almost continuous upright joint. Which is not only a very great deceit, but, in lofty buildings, is dangerous.'

(London Prices of Bricklayers' Materials, 1748).

Perhaps it is this practice which explains why so many Spitalfields houses have been refaced, although No. 13 was well-constructed: its walls are of 18" brickwork in the basement and still 13 ½ " at second floor level.

The **timber** used was almost exclusively imported pine and, where visible, almost always painted. By this date pine had virtually supplanted English oak, which by now was more scarce and therefore more expensive and the use of oak was restricted to handrails etc. and only best quality joinery. Doors and panelling were therefore of pine. Plain, painted-deal panelling was used in all but the poorest houses, being generally 'the thinnest that can possibly be found. This makes the rooms wider and contributes to lessen the expense.' Panelled partitions, as opposed to fully framed walls, were often all that separated rooms in smaller houses, as is the case at No. 13. In fact, full-height panelling was becoming unfashionable by 1720 for the better houses, but continued in humbler surroundings as at No. 13. Plank-and-muntin partitions and plank doors also continued, as at No 13, to be used in the garrets and basements even in large houses.

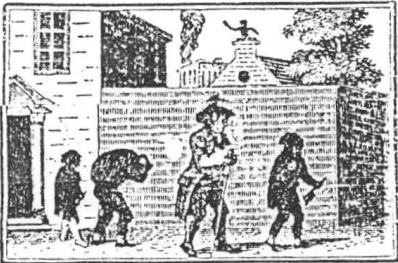
Timber was still considered an essential addition to a brick structure: builders could not yet bring themselves to desert the timber framing traditions of centuries and so timber was also much used to strengthen walls as well as for the roof structure. Cross bearings provided a superstructure for timber planking for floors and timber spreaders were introduced into the walls to spread the load across the brick pillars between windows. This was recommended by contemporary practitioners even though timbers could 'crack' the building through movement and even though softwood is liable to deteriorate because of the lime in the mortar as well as being susceptible to wet and dry rot. Robert Campbell wrote in the *London Tradesman* in 1747 that: 'the carpenter, by the strength of wood, contributes more to the standing of the house, than all the bricklayers' labour.' In fact, the physical evidence suggests this was not the case – typically, short lengths of timber were butted together so did not provide any real restraint. The inner and outer skins of a building would have behaved very differently. Corner-cutting became worse as the century wore on, and the longevity of the houses on Princelet Street suggest their builders still knew their craft. Even so, the slant of the windows on the rear elevation at No. 13 are evidence of dramatic structural movement at some stage in the house's history that may have had its roots in early 18th-century building technology.

Timber was also still used on the exterior and plenty of evidence remains in Spitalfields of partial weatherboarding on the outside of 18th-century houses.


Early Georgian **roofs** were generally tiled, either plain or pantiles. The garrets built for the weavers' workshops in Spitalfields were generally too shallow in pitch for ordinary tiles, which is why pantiles are so common in the area.

The commonest source of **water** in the early 18th century was still the public fountain or conduit, often erected by private benefactor, from which water was fetched by pitcher. This was probably the water source for the earliest residents at No. 13. Not until the 19th century were fountains replaced by pumps. Rain water was another source and more substantial houses had their own well in the basement or backyard. Water was also available for a small fee from water carriers. Piped water was the most expensive option and still embryonic at this date even in London. As piped water was only intermittently supplied, a cistern was as essential for storing piped water as it was for rainwater. The lead cistern was typically housed in the basement, usually used as the kitchen; again, we may imagine this at No.13.

The initial provision of **sewers and drainage** usually fell to the primary speculators before individual leases had been assigned. So in October 1718, Wood and Mitchell petitioned the Tower Hamlets Commissioners of Sewers for permission to make a sewer from the houses they were building on Princes/let Street. They were granted permission to make a sewer along Brown's Lane (today's Hanbury Street) 'and so far thence to return southwards cross Joyce's Garden toward the Church so far as their land extends' (apparently along the line of today's Wilkes Street) and then to make a sewer 'running from about the middle of the said intended Crosse sewer... thro Princesse Street to the common sewer in Booth Street' (today Princelet Street east of Brick Lane). A brick drain would have been laid under each house leading beneath the road to the public sewer. Only liquid waste entered the sewers. Most houses had a cesspit for solids, from which some liquids still percolated away, with obvious dangers to health when drinking water could be drawn from wells. Solids were emptied periodically by the nightmen who laboriously carried it from cesspit to cart by the bucket load. Privies were inevitably smelly and so typically built outside as 'bog-houses' across the backyard or as closets, often multi-storey, against the house wall and it is likely that the early extension at the back of No. 13 housed closets. The cesspit (a brick-lined circular pit) would be directly beneath, and connected to the main drain. Water closets were not unusual in houses of the upper classes at this date though perhaps less likely in a house of No 13's stature.



WILLIAM HALL,
Chimney-Sweeper and Nightman,
No. 1, SMALL-COAL ALLEY,
Near SPITAL SQUARE,
NORTON-FALGATE.



Robert Stone
NIGHTMAN & RUBBISH-CARTER
*At the Golden Pole the Upper End
of White Cross Street, near Old Street*

NB. Decently Performs all he Undertakes
now carried on by his Daughter

18th-century trade cards for nightmen (and, it seems, -women) who emptied cess pits at night. That for Robert Stone is enlarged for the interesting detail it shows of the street, and of the open door at the end of the passage in the house he is attending. Who let him in so late? Presumably some poor servant. William Hall, with his Dickensian chimney boys, may well have serviced No. 13, as he was based just round the corner in Spital Square.

As for **how rooms were used** in such 18th-century houses, Isaac Ware in his *Complete Body of Architecture* of 1756 describes a pattern for the 'common house in London' to which No. 13 is likely to have conformed originally. It was, he says, 'the general custom to make two rooms and a light closet [i.e. with window] on each floor.' The early rear extension at No. 13 may have fulfilled this purpose.

On the basement floor: 'the front room... is naturally the kitchen; the vault runs under the street with an area in between, in which is to be a cistern and there may be behind other vaults beyond another area.' Such vaults would be also used to be used to store coal and ash, and they remain (though hidden) at No. 13. The average house might have two to three fires burning a day, so that large quantities of coal would be needed and ash be produced. The coal was usually shot into the vaults via a coal hole beneath a slab in the street. On the ground floor: 'In common houses the fore parlour is the best room upon the ground floor; the passage cuts off a good deal from this, and from the back parlour, this usually running strait into the opening, or garden as it is called, behind.'

At first floor level Ware tells us you would typically have found the dining room at the front and 'a bed-chamber over the back parlour and closet over its closet.' Ware also states that 'in a house something better than the common kind, the back room upon the first floor should be a drawing-room, or dressing-room, for the lady; for it is better not to have any bed on this floor.' It is interesting that Ware sees a dining room as essential and a drawing room as a luxury (a parlour could fulfil its purpose). The role of the dressing room is not one we would recognise today: 'in the house of a person of fashion [it] is a room of consequence, not only for its natural use in being the place of dressing, but for the several persons who are seen there. The morning is the time many choose for the dispatching business [and so must] admit [people] while they are dressing.'

'The two rooms on the second floor are for bedrooms and the closets being carried up thus far, there may be a third bed there. Over these are the garrets, which may be divided into a larger number than the floors below, for the reception of beds for servants.' Servants might also sleep in the basement floor.

As the years wore on and circumstances changed, the double-room plan of No. 13 and its contemporaries made them very adaptable for multi-occupancy, a common staircase servicing what were effectively small apartments on each floor.

THE RESTORATION OF 13 PRINCELET STREET

13 Princelet Street in 1984, before Peter Lerwill's restoration.



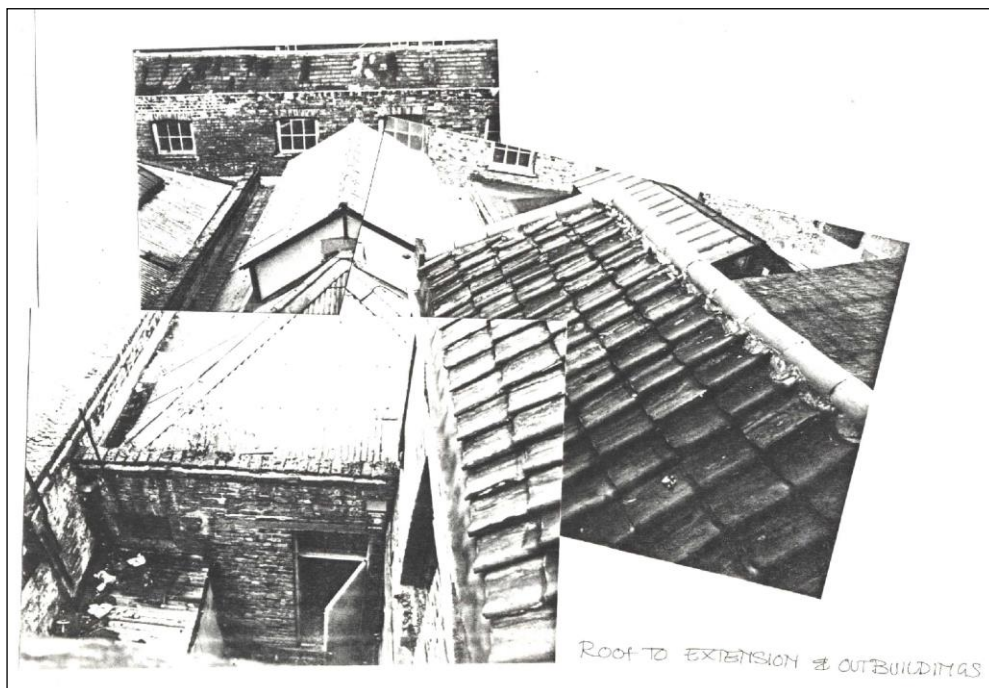
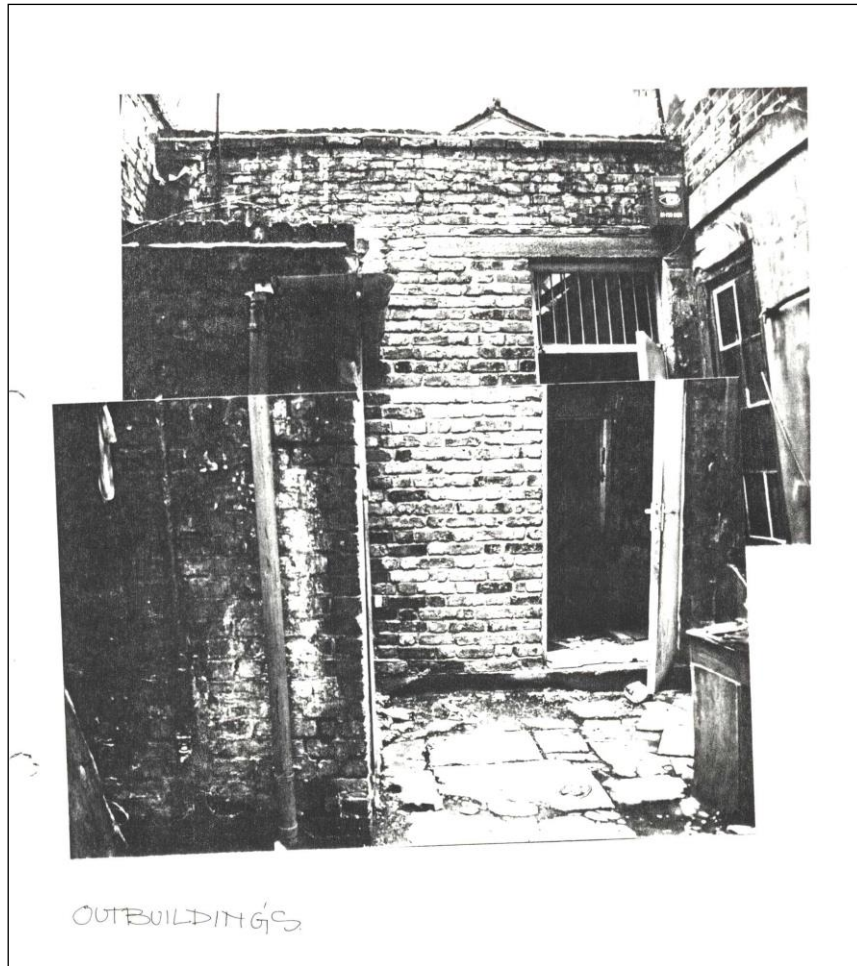
**Front and rear elevations.
The lower two storeys are
rendered at the rear and
the early extension just
visible to the left.**



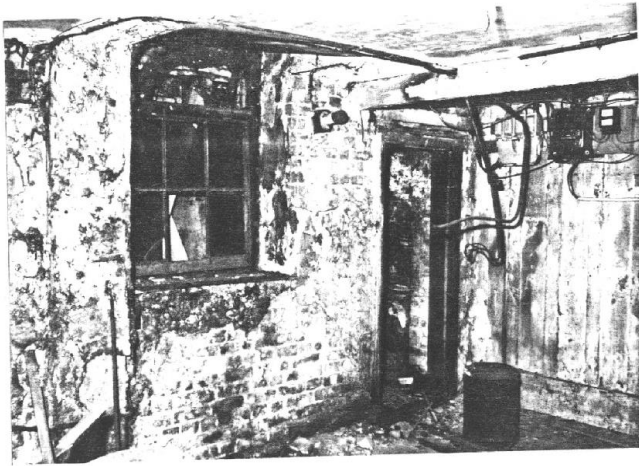
Ground floor, front room before restoration.



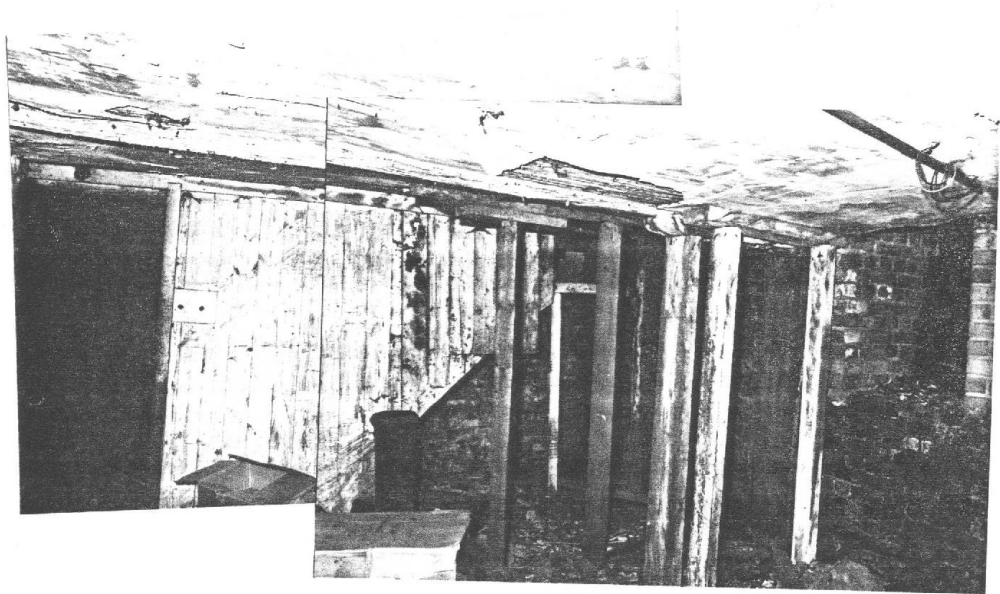
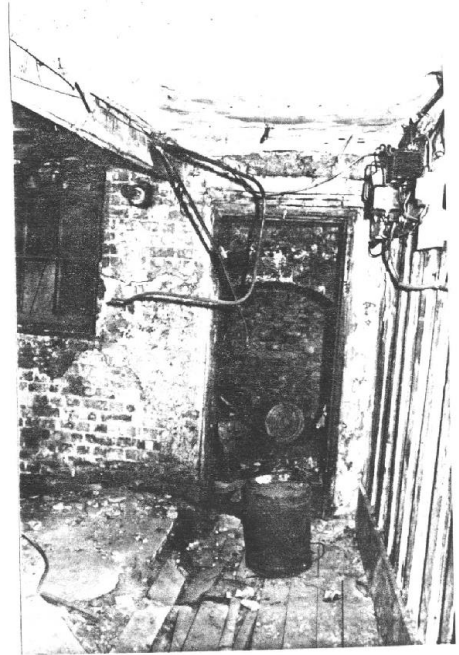
Second floor.



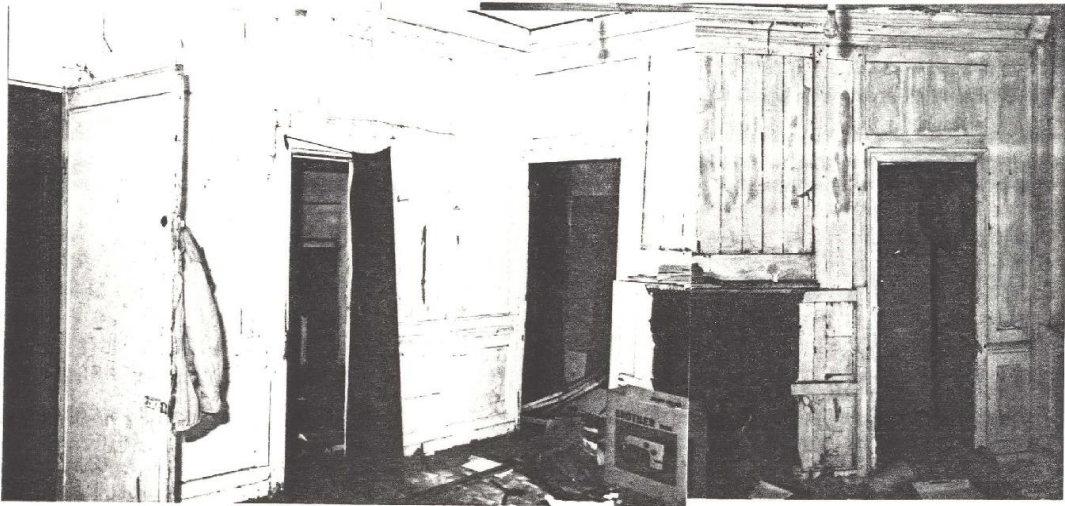
The back yard in 1984, clogged with outbuildings.



BASEMENT - FRONT ROOM.



BASEMENT - REAR ROOM.



1ST FLOOR - FRONT ROOM.



2ND FLOOR.

7. THE RESTORATION OF 13, PRINCELET STREET

Phase 1: Peter Lerwill's restoration

As these photos show, when Peter Lerwill took on the house at No. 13 Princelet Street in 1984, he was faced with a serious restoration campaign and he employed Julian Harrap as architect, helped by Judy Allen and Gary Butler. Although the house retained the original panelling, it all needed repair and the front door case had been lost. The double hung vertical sliding sash windows on the front elevation were not primary and had probably been replaced when this elevation was first re-faced – and replaced flush with the external face of the wall.

The fenestration on the rear elevation, with very slim glazing bars dividing the sashes, was still original. Most of these windows were salvageable. The rear elevation of the house was suffering from subsidence and some rebuilding was essential. The roof had been redone at some stage and a two storey extension built at the rear at a fairly early stage. After inspecting the roof, Julian Harrap wrote: 'This house does not have a weavers loft as is frequently found in the houses of this style in this area and it would appear that there never was one judging by the existing party parapet walls. As these weavers' lofts were later extensions to the original building, I suspect that in this case for some reason, possibly relating to the use of the building at the time, the then building owners decided to extend the building to the rear of the property rather than adding an extra floor.'

Re-roofing, showing parapets and party walls. Note the carpenter's marks.



On the second floor, there was evidence of a central partition across the room, probably panelled, although this storey was found as a single, double aspect space. The floor was covered in hardboard. The balustrading and handrail to the stairs at this level were thought to be Victorian, the stairs sloping but sound. As is common in buildings of this date, the floor joists span from the party and main walls onto two main beams. While the house is generally well built (note, for example the mitred hearth timbers to cover the end grain), the central spine wall and party walls are brick to first floor level and timber above.



One of the massive wooden intermediate beams which support the floor joists. It has been laid in flat rather than vertical section, an ancient framing practice being used to create the fashionable, flat ceilings that retained structural strength.

Both first floor rooms retained their original panelling, cornice and skirting, as well as cupboards beside the fireplaces, both of which had been altered. The shutters were also lost, but even so it was the architect's view that 'This floor contains some very attractive rooms and when renovated will provide a fine example of the architecture of the period.' The walls in both rooms on the ground floor had been covered in veneered hardboard, but the original panelling was happily still beneath, and this too represents a good example of the period.

Peter Lerwill then embarked on a three-year restoration, overseen by Julian Harrap and using Fullers Ltd as contractors. The roof was replaced and part of the rear wall underpinned and rebuilt, skilfully keeping the element of brick replacement below 50% so that it counted as a repair rather than new wall (in the end, less work was necessary than anticipated although more onerous structural standards had to be applied). The

house was re-wired and new central heating installed. All joist and beam ends and floorboards were reviewed and overhauled or replaced as necessary, and all floors and walls tied in. Most of the ceilings were replaced. Brick piers were built to support the beam ends in the basement.



Rebuilding the rear elevation, after demolition of the extension.

The basement was fitted out as a utility room to the rear and a bedroom to the front. The vault under the pavement to the front, says the design brief, 'is to be used for the storage of wine and small children!!' The front ground floor parlour became the dining room, with restored cornice, panelling and chair rail. The original fire opening was re-established (unfortunately, all the original chimney pieces had been lost and so Peter Lerwill introduced others). The room behind, to be a breakfast room, had similar works to it. The extension at the back was demolished and a new one built to become the kitchen, with a new bay window to give extra light and space in a spacious kitchen, preserve transparency against the breakfast room window and satisfy the brief for a small bathroom above.

On the first floor, the front room became the main living room. Extra storage space was created by bringing forward the wall on either side of the chimney breast. The room behind became a study, its fireplace restored to its original dimensions, with a narrow opening leading into the bathroom in the extension.



The new extension under construction, the rear elevation having been rebuilt.

The second floor became the principal bedroom and a bathroom. On the final flight of the staircase is a run of primary plank and muntin panelling, typically used in this way for areas of lower status. In re-partitioning the space, the design for the modern panelling was based on the plank and muntin design at the top of the stairs, the two phases of work being easily distinguishable by the presence or absence of patina. As Peter Lerwill was keen to keep a sense of openness on this floor, the main partition did not cross the full width of the room. The outbuildings in the back yard were cleared and the yard re-landscaped. Finally, a new timber doorcase was installed around the front door. This is now acknowledged to be somewhat out of scale but has become a part of both house and street.

The restoration was completed in 1987, commemorated, appropriately enough for a future Master of the Worshipful Master of Plumbers, by dated rainwater hoppers. No. 13 re-emerged as a handsome house of its period, with an honest elegance. Peter Lerwill was to enjoy it for the next seventeen years, not quite to such authenticity of 18th-century existence as that to which his neighbour, Dennis Severs, aspired on Folgate Street but collecting nevertheless a fine collection of silver dated 1719 – the year in which the house was first completed.

Phase 2: Landmark's refurbishment

Peter Lerwill's restoration had been conducted with admirable skill, thoroughness and restraint throughout, so that the house had retained its sense of age and the joinery especially had kept its patina. There was very little we needed or wanted to do to the house to open it as a Landmark and our intervention was therefore mostly limited to redecoration, using colours from the 18th-century palette. Like Peter Lerwill, we have respected the nicks and dents of age in the joinery, which have been left unfilled.

One change we did make was the insertion of new chimney pieces in the dining and sitting rooms, more in keeping with the age of the house than those we found. A few Delft tiles had been found in the hearths in the 1980s and Peter Lerwill had collected others. These have been left as we found them.

The window heads in the sitting room had been raised at some stage to a level above the cornice, presumably to let in more light. This made it difficult to fit shutters (the originals had been lost here) or indeed curtain poles, and it is this which directed us towards the use of rollerblinds.

The flooring on the second floor, which Peter Lerwill found beneath hardboard and recovered in plywood, had deteriorated so far that this time it needed replacing entirely, although where possible sound boards were re-used to patch elsewhere in the house. Also on the second floor, we extended the modern partition across the whole width of the house, as it had probably been originally, which allowed us to create a small lobby with essential storage space. We also moved the door into the bedroom so that it opens from this lobby area rather than from the head of the stairs, which also permits a separate door into the bathroom.

On the walls in the basement hang reproductions of 18th-century silk designs, identified at the end of this album.

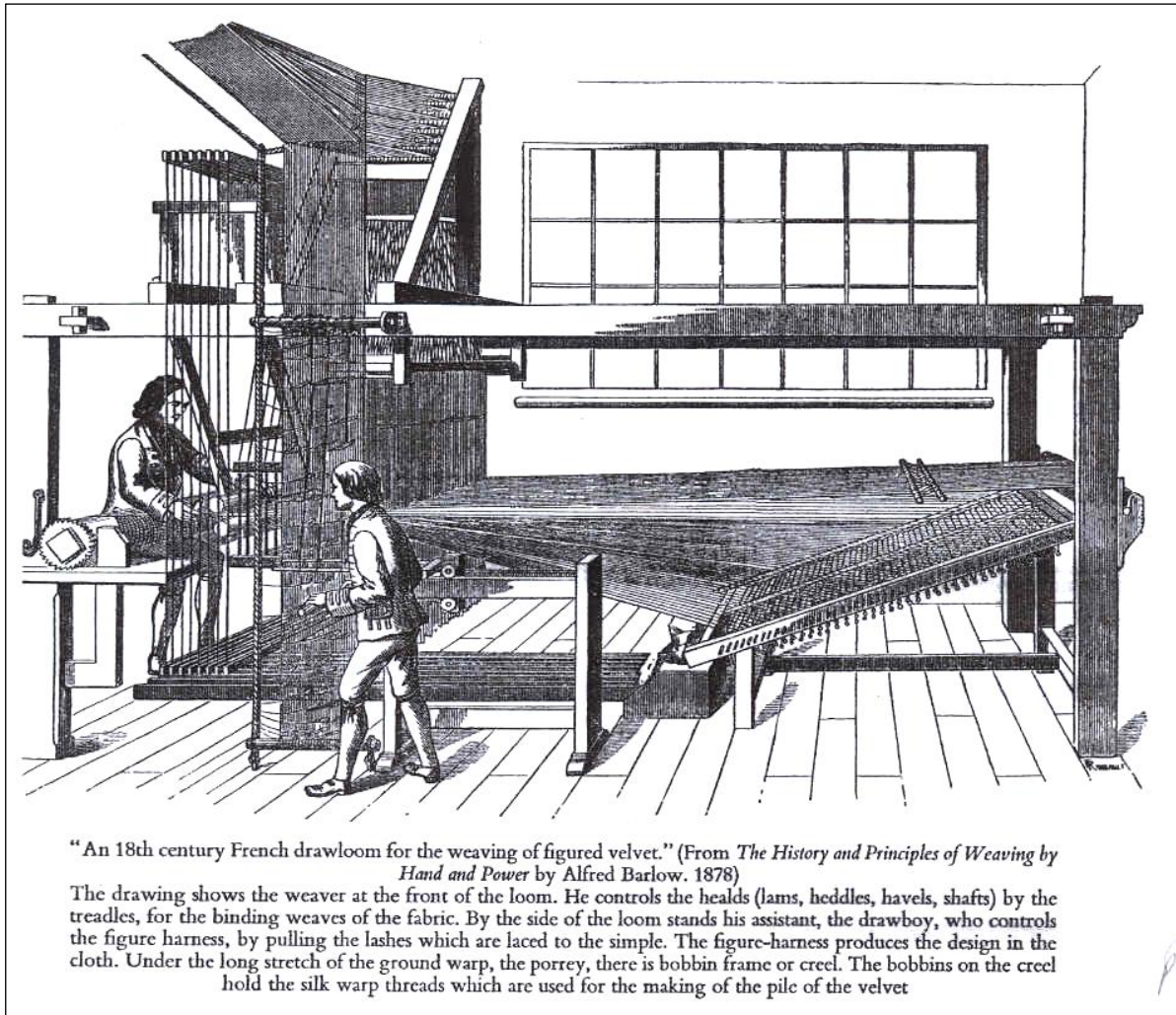
Thanks chiefly to Peter Lerwill's restoration, No. 13 Princelet Street approaches its three hundredth birthday as sound as it has ever been – and for this, credit must also be given to Edward Buckingham and his men who, speculative builders or not, built a house to last.

8. THE SILK INDUSTRY IN SPITALFIELDS

'Spitalfields silks' were famous in their day, the best of them the equivalent of the most sought after and expensive high fashion label today. How did an ancient skill become concentrated in a small, upstart district and achieve such distinction so quickly? But first, how were the cocoons of grubs transformed into such wondrous fabrics?

The start of it all is the moth *Bombyx mori*, which lays its eggs on the leaves of mulberry trees. The larva then pupates, spinning a cocoon for itself from some four thousand yards of silk that it produces from two glands under its lip. The spinning process lasts three or four days, the grub moving its head round continuously and the thread is deposited so regularly that about a fifth can be wound off the cocoon without difficulty. To do this, the cocoon is taken off a few days after its completion and the pupa killed by dry heat or steam to avoid damage to the silk. The cocoon is then floated in a tray of hot water to soften the gummy substance that binds the threads together. The main filament is found from four, eight or more cocoons and these are then fixed to a cocoon-reeling machine, which gave a slight twist to these filaments to produce a single thread, known as raw silk. The raw silk is then dyed and varying numbers of the threads twisted to produce yarns of the required thickness. These are then passed to the weaver.

In the eighteenth century, the manufacturer obtained the silk usually in the gum state (hard silk) and passed it to the dyer for degumming, who gave it to the throwster to twist the filaments before returning it for dyeing. The winder, either at home or in a factory, then wound the skeins of silk onto bobbins for either warp or weft. Then the warp (or ground threads for the pattern) had to be made, usually on a domestic warping mill: the thread was wound onto a hand stick or into a ball and was taken by the weaver with his cane roller or warp beam to the turn-on or warp spreader. The warp spreader wound the threads evenly on the cane roller to the width required for the fabric. The weaver then placed the warp in the loom by either entering the ends through the loom harness or by twisting the ends of the new warp onto the ends of the old warp to lengthen a piece of work in progress. This division of labour was suited to piecework by the whole family and survived in the silk industry long after it had ceased in the manufacture of wool and cotton. It also illustrates how a single loom provided a livelihood of sorts for far more individuals than just the weaver.



The principle of figured weaving (shown here for velvet). The figure harness, in front of the weaver, introduces the pattern by lifting pre-determined threads according to squared cards devised from the original designs and adapted to the required thread count. Not surprisingly, the setting up of the loom and drawing of the threads was a skill in its own right.

As for the history of the skill, the culture and weaving of silk had begun in China, where the silk moth was a native. According to ancient Chinese records, the 'lady of Si-ling', wife of emperor Hwang-ti, who ruled China about 2650 BC, encouraged the cultivation of the mulberry trees on which the silkworms fed, the rearing of the larvae and the reeling of silk. Silk cultivation and its weaving became the private domestic occupation of Chinese women, and the skill gradually spread to Persia, India, Japan and the East in general. The ancient Romans and Greeks used silk, but apparently did not cultivate it themselves. The Moors learnt the skill from the Arabs and carried it into Spain in the 9th century and in the 11th century Roger I, Count of Sicily, brought Greek silk weavers to Palermo to instruct his subjects in its culture and weaving.

Knowledge soon spread from there to Italy, where the soil and climate proved especially suitable to the culture of mulberry trees. The Italians rapidly achieved supremacy in silk manufacture, which they maintained throughout the Renaissance period. The art spread slowly to other European countries. In England at this time, it was never more than a very minor activity, the weaving of small quantities of raw silk probably obtained from Italy. In the Netherlands however, with its tradition of tapestry weaving, it soon became an industry of considerable importance.

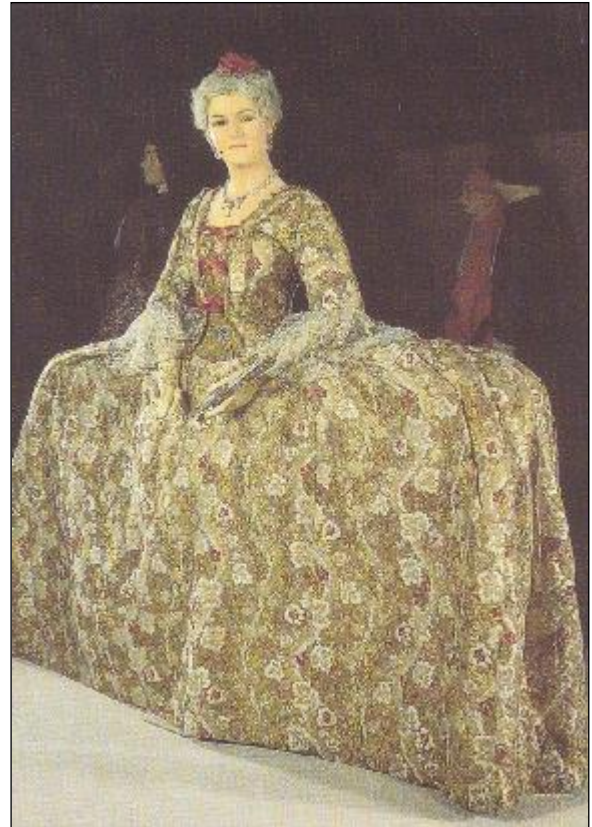
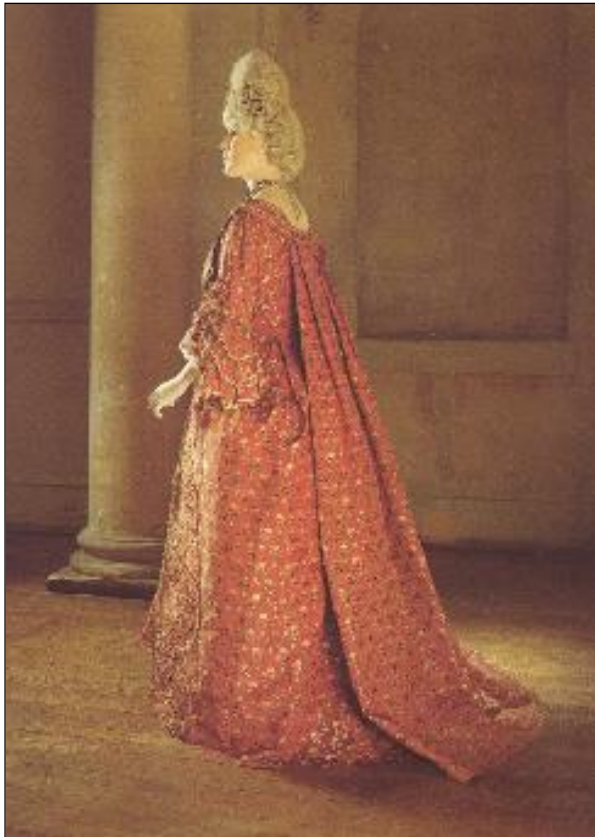
The French tried to tempt Italian silk weavers to settle in their country as early as 1480, but met with little success until they conquered the Duchy of Milan in 1521, after which returning nobles brought with them silk weavers and other operatives. They were settled, with extensive privileges and protection, around Tours and Lyons, from where the craft soon spread to other cities in southern France. Most of those working in the industry were Protestants, known by the Catholics as Huguenots, and the process of their flight to England from religious persecution has already been described in Chapter 1.

While the French *imigrés* undoubtedly invigorated the native industry, Nathalie Rothstein, best known historian of the topic, also emphasises native continuity. 'The majority of the English silk industry from top to bottom were...always English' though no pattern books survive from earlier than around 1700.

There were other centres of silk weaving in England, notably in Canterbury, York and Cumberland but London became increasingly dominant through the eighteenth century, and the richest and most important men in all Branches of the industry (as officially subdivided by the Company of Weavers) gravitated towards Spital Square, Princes/let Street and Church Street.

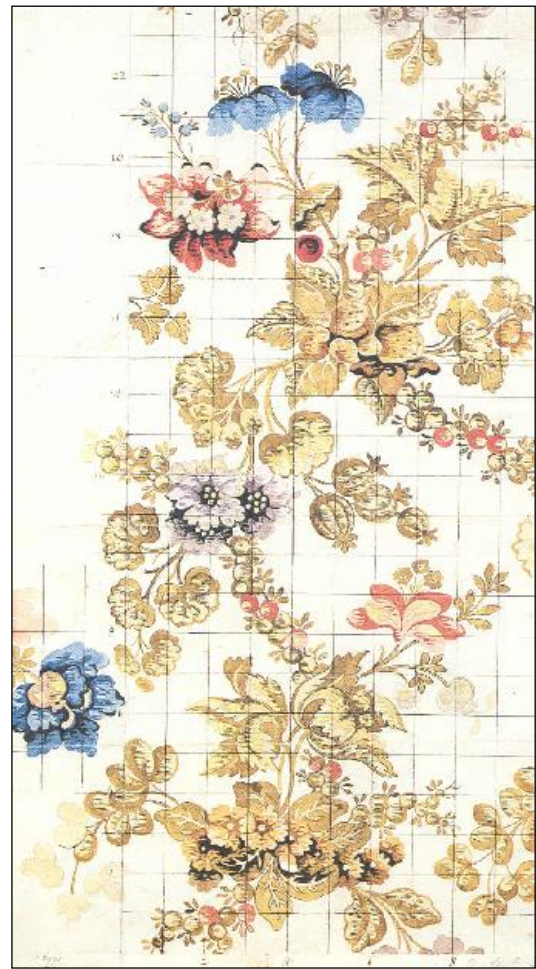
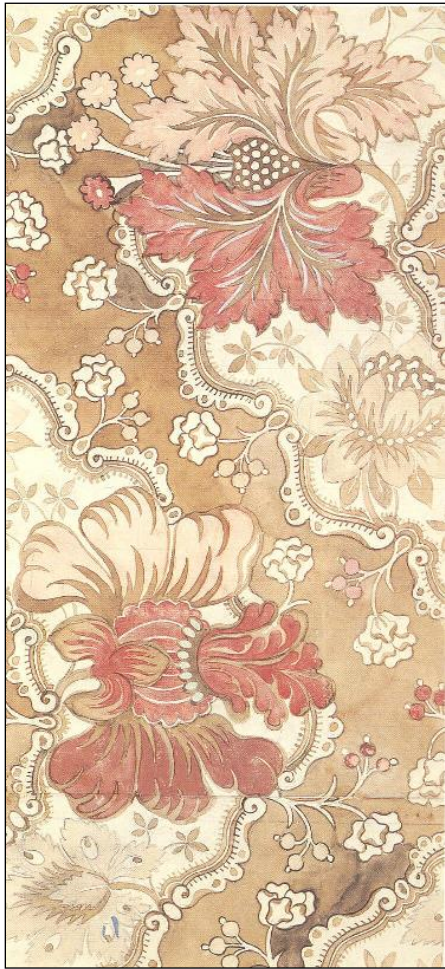
Nearly all London silks were for dress rather than furnishings and this affected the designs. English silk designs reflect the wider transition in aesthetics from Baroque to Rococo in the period and were distinctive in their preference for real rather than abstract objects, for colouring very close to nature and above all for botanical naturalism whenever current tastes permitted. An article in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in June 1749 compared the 'glare of colours' in French silks and their 'tawdry tinsel appearances' with English silks which were 'pictures of great delicacy and ornament,' finding a contrast between 'good sense and affectation.' The silk designers' role was important for it was their patterns rather than the cut of the costume that determined fashion and for all the contribution of the Huguenots to the industry at large, some of the finest and best known designers were in fact English.

One of the best known and most prolific was a woman, Anna Maria Garthwaite, who lived from 1690-1746. In about 1730, she came with her twice-widowed sister, Mary Danny, from York, to live at No. 2 Princes/let Street, surrounded by the weavers who executed her designs. The daughter of a Grantham clergyman, we do not know how Anna Maria came by the technical expertise necessary to produce the designs that flew from her pen. On average, she produced around 80 designs a year and around 1,000 in total. Her close observation of actual botanical specimens is apparent in the accuracy of her designs to nature. The image of silk designers wandering the gardens of then semi-rural Spitalfields in search of plants and insects to inspire their designs is, like the caged singing birds, part of the folk memory of the area, but it is based on firm evidence. Joseph Dandridge (1660-1746), an Englishman who produced many fine designs for silk, also achieved distinction as a botanist, ornithologist and entomologist, going on field expeditions in his spare time. Reproductions of several designs by these two designers, now in the Drawings Collection at the V & A, hang on the top floor at Princelet Street.



Examples of eighteenth-century dresses of figured silks (Museum of Costume, Bath). The ridiculously wide Court dress (from the early 1760s) is an example of how fashion can get out of control in any century; ladies had to turn sideways to get through doors. A dress length of such fabric would cost the equivalent of two year's wages of the weaver who wove it.

As well as the Museum of Costume in Bath, there is a fine display of Spitalfields silks and designs in the British Galleries at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, including several by Anna Maria Garthwaite.



Examples of silk designs. Top left: Anna Maria Garthwaite, 1732. Top right: A M Garthwaite, c. 1736. Bottom: James Leman, a Dutch immigre, 1721. (V & A)

While patterned silks were the chief glory of the industry, most of its output was plainer and aimed at a cheaper market and the refugees contributed in quantity as well as quality. The Huguenots already settled often put up capital or acted as entrepreneurs for the newly arrived. In fact, the English silk industry had marked advantages over that around Tours and Lyon. London was a port, a centre of fashion and finance and a capital city and enjoyed a growing export market with America. It was also protectionist: by 1699 Persian and Indian woven silks were excluded and a campaign from 1719-21 which engaged Daniel Defoe as one of its key propagandists secured the prohibition of the use and wearing of printed calicoes.

Weavers specialised in one Branch or another, such as black silks, flowered silks, handkerchiefs, or damasks. For much of the 18th century, weavers would still have been in direct touch with private patrons. Some weavers wove for export, others for the mercers at Ludgate Hill or Covent Garden. Some produced a range speculatively and hoped that mercers would place an order, while most worked increasingly on commission from the mercers.

The silk industry reached the height of its prosperity at the end of the eighteenth century, but its rise was not always smooth. The bigger master weavers might welcome the influx of foreign labour, but smaller masters and journeymen periodically expressed their 'grievous discontents', resenting claims of greater skills and fearing competition for work and accommodation, especially from unskilled weavers and those who sought to avoid the ordinances of the Weavers' Company. As a fashion trade, the industry was subject to sharp fluctuations, troughs sending the poorer weavers and their families into the depths of privation. A few master weavers might risk manufacturing for stock, but this could result in heavy losses given the fickleness of taste.

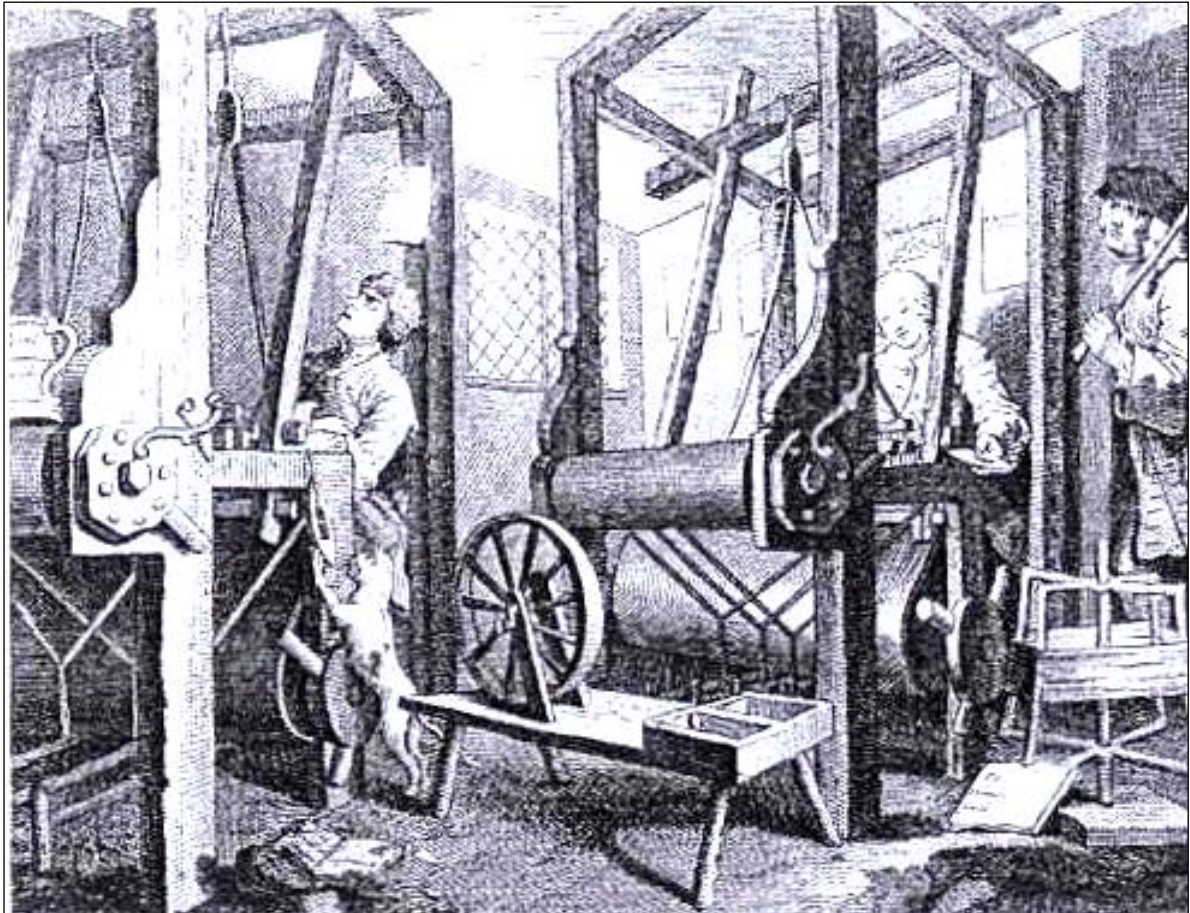
There were also periodic shortages of raw material, imported from Turkey and the Levant, Italy, India and China and therefore vulnerable to disruption from natural causes or foreign wars. Taste can also be perverse: high import duties protected English silks until 1765, but price coupled with scarcity only added to the appeal of the attractive foreign fabrics, many of them smuggled into the country. It became almost a craze among the *fashionistas* of the day to have the latest and rarest French silks brought in by

smugglers – so much so that some English manufacturers even resorted to trying to pass off their goods as lately smuggled from France.

Until 1773, such resentment could and often did boil over into civil disturbances in Spitalfields and surrounding areas. Our residents at No. 13, otherwise only names and sometimes occupations, lived through these times and such events provide a further dimension to what might otherwise be a tendency to imagine life in Spitalfields in the eighteenth century as a sunlit existence of prosperity, the flowering of a decorative skill in contented creativity amid singing birds.

Silk weaving had begun as a cottage industry, individual weavers working with other members of their family and dependent on other craftsmen for the various phases of the work – silk winding, dyeing, warp spreading, loom making and so on. By now, however, the more successful weavers had begun to employ apprentices and journeymen, and to employ other cottage weavers to manufacture their more popular designs to meet the demands of the mercers. As the industry became still more organised, factors emerged, first as employees but then as businessmen in their own right, middlemen who made it their business to acquire woven silks at the lowest possible rates.

As so often, the increasing distance between the point of production and the consumer market led to journeymen and smaller weavers becoming increasingly discontented with their rates of pay and resentful at those they saw as evading industry regulations. Spare time, either enforced through lack of work or because the more skilled found they could get by without working full time, gave the discontented the opportunity to 'combine' and demonstrate or resort to direct action. In 1762, some 2,000 weavers destroyed looms and materials and had to be quelled by calling out the Guards. Relief was promised but did not come and in 1765 the weavers marched to Wimbledon to petition the King himself of redress. In April 1768 a mob of weavers went at midnight to the houses of journeymen weavers in Spitalfields and destroyed sixteen looms, and in August a 17-year old boy was shot dead on a similar raid. A club called The Cutters was formed, which attempted to run a protection racket by levying an unofficial tax from anyone who owned a loom. The Cutters were quashed in 1769, when five members were executed.



Hogarth's engraving of weavers, *Industry & Idleness, the Fellow 'Prentices at their Looms* (1747) is typically moralistic. The industrious apprentice works busily, while the stern master hefts his stick as he observes the other apprentice snoozing at his loom. The caption, based on Proverbs: 23 v. 21, suggests the latter is sleeping off his drink: 'The Drunkard shall come to Poverty & drowsiness shall cloath a Man with rags.' The industrious apprentice can expect that 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich' (Proverbs: 10 v. 4)

Meanwhile a negotiating Committee of masters and journeymen succeeded in agreeing a Book of Prices for the industry. It closes with a poem which ends:

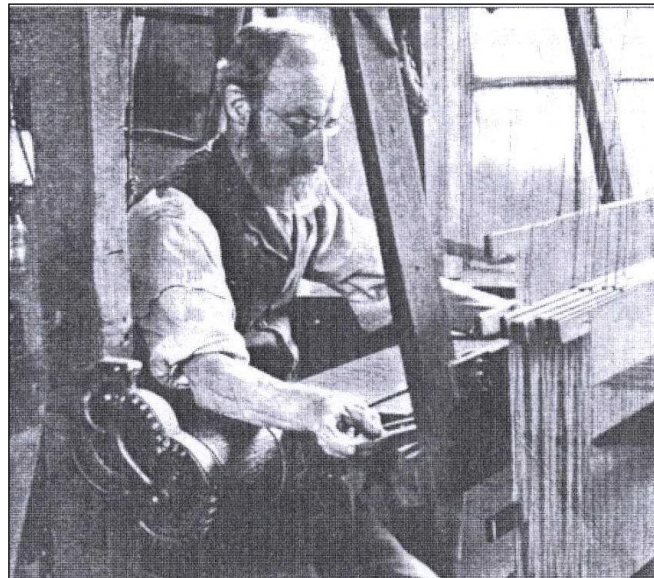
May upright masters still augment their treasure,
And journeymen pursue their work with pleasure,
May arts and manufacturies still increase,
And Spitalfields be blest with prosperous peace.

But there was again serious unrest in the winter of 1770-1, when a mob stoned to death a weaver who had given evidence against previous offenders. This resulted in the measures known as the Spitalfields Acts, the first of which was passed in 1773 and gave the Lord Mayor, the City aldermen and JPs the power to regulate wages and prices for piecework, from which no master weaver could deviate and which was periodically updated. Another Act prohibited the importation and even the wearing of foreign-wrought silk. Despite faults, the Spitalfields Acts replaced a decade of discord and violence with half a century of comparative calm, orderly negotiations and generally fair rates of pay. By this time, 15,000 looms in the district were supporting around 40,000 workers.

However, the prosperity of an essentially artisan industry was destined to be shortlived as mechanisation developed. After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the forces in favour of unrestricted trade gathered momentum. In 1824 the Spitalfields Acts were repealed and in 1826 all prohibition on imported silks removed, followed by gradual reduction in import duties. This was a victory for the big silk manufacturers who dealt in bulk and benefited from export markets; journeymen and artisan weavers remained quiet, stunned by the news. Power looms were also beginning to be introduced in the same years. Though numbers employed in the industry continued to grow (by 1832 the population in the area entirely dependent on silk manufacture was estimated to be 50,000 with as many again indirectly concerned), wages remained low. The industry was moving into modern methods of commercial organisation and a period of long and terminal decline had begun. To conjure Spitalfields in the mid-nineteenth century, we need look no further than a wonderful piece of *reportage* by Charles Dickens in his *Household Words* series. Its opening paragraph started this album, but it is reproduced in full in the accompanying

Reader Volume. Read as if the transcript for, say, a documentary programme on Radio 4 today and you can almost hear the voices of Spitalfields in Dickens's day.

A School of Design was established in Spitalfields in an attempt to maintain standards but this took a number of years to make progress. The economic death knell sounded for many in 1860 when a Commercial Treaty was made with France, which enabled foreign silks to be purchased more cheaply than they could be manufactured in England. A few of the largest firms who had adopted the factory system struggled on, but most weavers were plunged into crisis. By 1914, there were just 46 workshops, mostly in the east of Bethnal Green. By 1931, eleven elderly weavers were still working in the area, changing fashions relegating their skill to smaller items like ties, cravats and handkerchiefs rather than the dress and furnishing lengths of old. Today, there is only one company still producing silks on hand looms, based in Essex. Some of their off-cuts of damask silk have been used as cushion covers for the Landmark.



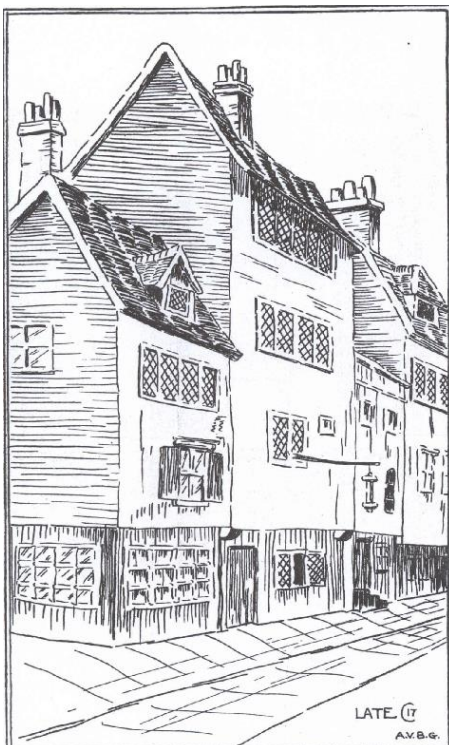
One of the last Spitalfields silk weavers, in about 1900.

5. THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SILK INDUSTRY IN SPITALFIELDS

The economic history of Spitalfields can still be read in its buildings today, of which some 35% are listed, an exceptionally high proportion. In few (if any) other London districts was the provision of new housing so clearly and directly associated with the needs of a single industry. The weavers' home life was dominated by their work and in most cases their houses should be understood not simply as domestic architecture but also as industrial buildings.

None of the earliest 16th- and 17th- century weavers' houses survive. They would have been timber-framed and a few drawings survive, done in the early 1840s just before the demolition of much of old Spitalfields to make way for the building of Commercial Street. They were distinguishable as weavers' houses by the long, multi-light windows, often on more than one storey suggesting more than one loomshop per house. Silk weavers would hang a silk spool outside to advertise their trade and this was characteristic of the district as long as the weavers plied their trade. The last disappeared with the coming of the Second World War.

Folgate Street and Princelet Street have some of the oldest weavers' houses today, some with double entrances allowing journeymen direct access to the weaving rooms on the attic floor – probably not ceiled, to accommodate the bulky looms. This separation of working and living spaces is also an indication of the affluence of the master weavers.



A montage of seventeenth-century weavers' houses, drawn in the early 1840s when much of old Spitalfields was being demolished to make way for the extension of Commercial Street. Note the silk bobbin hanging outside.

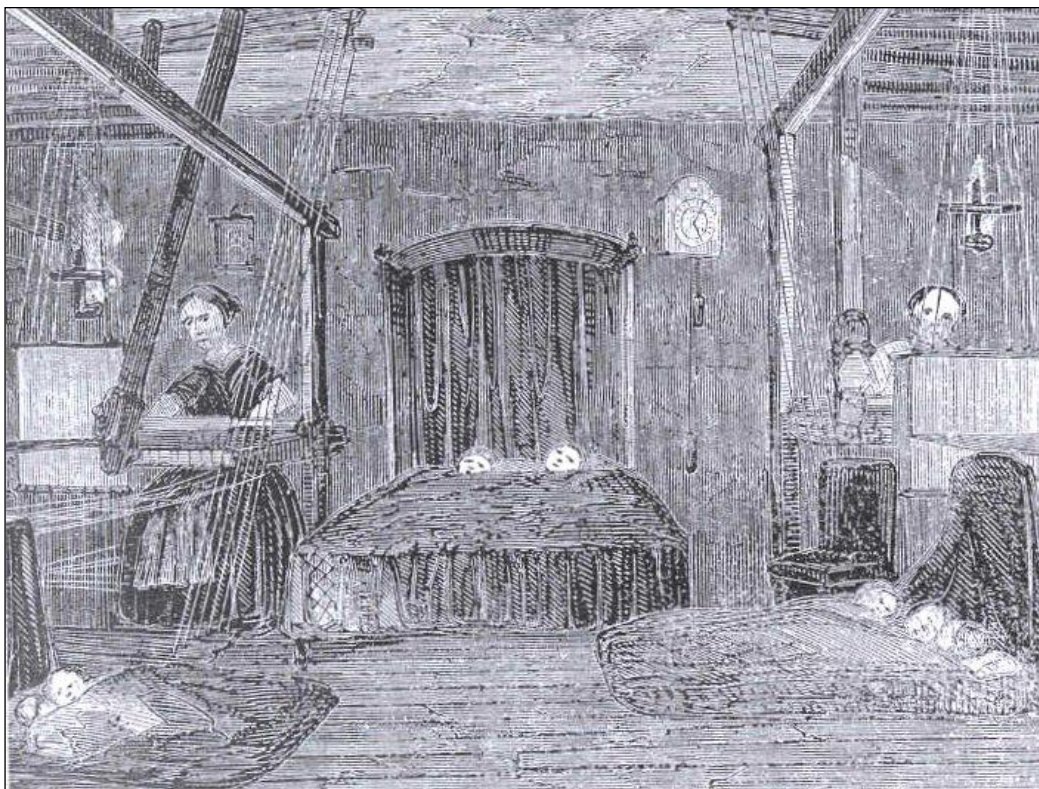
Fournier Street was built 1725-31 by a number of different speculators and contains house of varying sizes and quality. This mix within a single street is characteristic of the early part of the century; by 1800, variety of wealth and status was more likely to be expressed in the contrast between streets within an estate rather than houses on an individual street.

Examples of the homes of more middling weavers can be seen in houses at the northern end of Brick Lane, built in the mid- to late- 18th century. The architecture has become less refined: doorways, windows and attics are plain and functional. The early 18th-century attic workshops were set slightly back from the plane of the front elevation to screen them from view. By the time of these later houses, such niceties have been abandoned and the weaving lights are flush with the front of the house. These windows are now more likely to be set in weatherboarded walls, rather than the tile-hung surrounds of earlier examples. Many of the later houses had shops on the ground floor, again in contrast to the earlier.

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the silk industry enjoyed a brief revival and this is reflected in the terraces of cottages for the ever-increasing population, today especially around Seabright Street and Viaduct Street in Bethnal Green. While essentially the same in design as other small terraced cottages in the East End, these are again distinguished by a single long weaving shop lit by a single tripartite, segment headed window, instead of the more usual top front bedroom lit by two separate windows. Most of these cottages had a box spiral staircase connecting the floors in order to save space. Some did not even have this, relying instead on ladders through trap doors in the corner of each room. Some such weaving shops were double aspect, to allow two looms to operate in the same room. Working looms are very noisy, and so to cut down the reverberation, waste cloth or sawdust was packed between the floorboards and joists. The average working day was 12-14 hours for a weaver and many suffered from chest complaints that they attributed to spending so much time leaning against the bars of the loom. The workrooms were seldom aired in order to keep humidity levels high. Humidity not only prevented the fine silk threads from snapping but, perhaps equally important, made the cloth, which was sold by weight, appear heavier. By now only smaller items like handkerchiefs and umbrella silks were typically made, distributed through warehouses, and so none of these smaller cottages had shop premises.

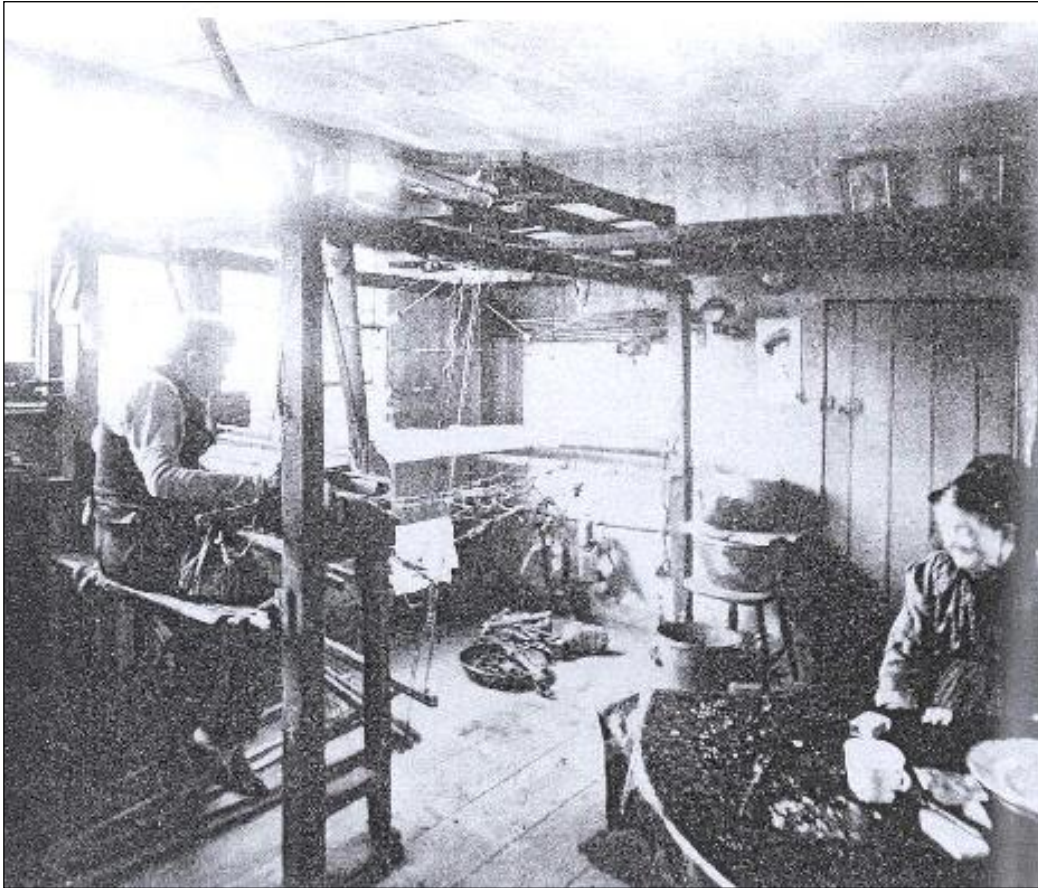


Typical early 19th-century weaver's cottage. Families often lived and worked in the same room. We can perhaps imagine Dickens's second call on his tour of Spitalfields being to a cottage such as this.



Conditions in a typical Spitalfields weaver's house in 1853 (*The Builder*). Though 13 Princelet Street was not yet multi-occupancy, that such an image was considered representative shows how overcrowded the area has become.

Many of the old houses were destroyed during the Blitz and many more in more modern redevelopments. Today's more developed awareness of the importance of conservation, helped by the vision of private individuals like Peter Lerwill, should ensure that no more are lost.



Weaving in a Spitalfields house in 1894, making clear how important the light was from the many-light window. An image such as this brings to life Charles Booth's *Map of Poverty*, published five years later.



View from the roof of No. 13 Princelet Street

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KEY TO REPRODUCTIONS OF SILK DESIGNS IN THE BASEMENT

All designs are held today in the Drawings Collection at the V & A.



**Joseph Dandridge,
1716**



**Joseph Dandridge,
1720**



**Anna-Maria
Garthwaite, 1732**



**James Leman,
1719**



**James Leman,
1720**



**Anna-Maria
Garthwaite,
compilation**



**Joseph Dandridge
1719**



**Anna-Maria
Garthwaite, 1734**