

# A host of histories:

## helping Year 9s explore multiple narratives through the history of a house

Described by the author Monica Ali as a building that 'sparks the imagination and sparks conversations', 19 Princelet Street, now a Museum of Diversity and Immigration, captivated the imagination of teacher David Waters. He was struck by the building's potential not merely for exploring the diverse histories of migrant communities in London, but for showing pupils how those histories overlapped and intersected and were themselves intertwined with broader, national and international histories. This article describes how he used the building and its changing history as a locus for an exploration of the extent and nature of diversity in migrants' experiences. It demonstrates how a very localised depth study can act as a window into a much bigger world, both chronologically and thematically.

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You pause on the steps of 19 Princelet Street and ponder who else has passed by; immediately, you sense a connectedness to the past (Figure 1). The building is both literally and metaphorically peeling away, revealing its myriad stories, a palimpsest, witness to centuries of diverse histories.<sup>1</sup> To enter 19 Princelet Street is, albeit briefly, to visit another world. The darkness and dilapidation obscure, yet hint at memories of times past. The eighteenth-century attic windows hidden among a grand merchant's address: a private prosperous world, yet divided? On the ground floor, the rounded Victorian adaptations, a double door: a public building, hinting at its late nineteenth-century usage as a synagogue. What kind of place is this, and what kinds of stories can it tell us?

### What's so special about 19 Princelet Street?

Today, 19 Princelet Street lies in the heart of London, in the diverse neighbourhood of Spitalfields. Yet the area was once fields, located well beyond the old medieval city walls. To the west the Augustinian Priory of St Mary Spital dominated the mostly pastoral landscape until the dissolution of the remaining monasteries began in 1539. Agar's 1560 map shows how rural a landscape this once was (Figure 2).

In the seventeenth century the city gorged slowly eastwards, eventually encroaching on and absorbing Spitalfields. The area attracted mainly French Huguenots but also Irish migrants and other non-conformists such as Quakers seeking the 'liberty' and refuge afforded in those lands outside Bishopsgate as well as the jurisdiction of the guilds of the City of London. By 1719, Samuel Worrall, a major builder in the area, and resident of 14 Princelet Street, had developed many tall and narrow properties, including 19 Princelet Street. In 1744 an important tenant in our story arrived: Peter Abraham Ogier. A Huguenot, Peter occupied the building until his death in 1756 aged 66; his wife Esther Dubosc resided there until her death ten years later. His niece Louisa Perrina married into the prestigious Courthauld family. There were at least eight Huguenot residences on the same side of Princelet Street by 1744; many would have come to family events at number 19 and marvelled at the grandeur of the first floor drawing room. A house with a seemingly grand narrative.

And yet, as Liz Taylor has argued, buildings, as places, can have multiple identities, '...built up by the diverse individuals and groups who live and who have lived there... the place is already linked up with other places in a complex spatial web. The uniqueness of place therefore comes from the particular global and local interrelationships which meet at that particular location.'<sup>2</sup> In its time, 19 Princelet Street was home not just to Huguenot migrants but to families from Ireland, Poland and Russia. Furthermore its identity is not simply a domestic one, but public: at different times it has housed a synagogue, community centre and, currently, a Museum of Immigration and Diversity. The charity which runs the museum has as its stated aim to 'preserve 19 Princelet Street, and to create there a permanent exhibition and educational resource telling the stories of the many diverse peoples and cultures who created our society.' The Chair of Trustees, Susie Symes, has said that as a Museum of Immigration and Diversity the building gives a '...a sense of history and ownership of the society you live in to people who don't necessarily feel a sense of identity and belonging to the streets where they live.'<sup>3</sup>

### Why build an enquiry around a building?

Using places and buildings to uncover multiple narratives and contested histories has been celebrated in recent histories of cities including London, Wrocław, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Venice.<sup>4</sup> Other historians have sought to use the history of a single building as a way of illuminating not just the lives of their inhabitants, but of the wider world in which they lived – Gillian Tindall's *The House by the Thames and the people who lived there* is an excellent example of such a history.<sup>5</sup> The recent spate of television documentaries exploring the history of places

Figure 1: 19 Princelet Street today

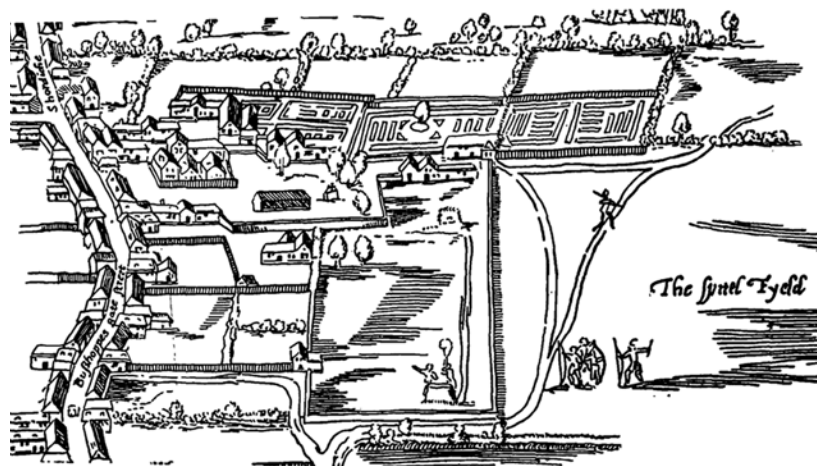


Matthew Andrews/19 Princelet Street

seems to testify to the popular appeal of such an approach.<sup>6</sup> Surely places should provide a dynamic locus of the past for our pupils as well? Indeed, other teachers such as Hughes and De Silva have already made a persuasive case for the value of local studies of a particular place, not simply in terms of their potential to engage pupils, but in illuminating broader national narratives.<sup>7</sup>

But why, of all the buildings we could have chosen, did we choose 19 Princelet Street? Our attention was first drawn to the potential of the building as a focus for an enquiry by the work of the Museum of Immigration and Diversity, which is now housed there. We were inspired by the Museum's use of the 'power of place' to engage people with multiple histories and with pressing social and political issues of diversity, inclusion, immigration and diversity. The very fabric of the building, the many stories suggested in its different layers, stirs the imagination. It forces us to consider, as the historian Trevelyn put it '...the quasi-miraculous fact that once, on this earth... walked other men and women, as actual as we are today, thinking their own thoughts, swayed by their own passions.'<sup>8</sup> As the Museum shows, within the history of this one building are multiple, overlapping and intersecting narratives, from the intimate stories of individuals who lived in and used the building to national political, social and economic narratives. We became convinced that building an enquiry around the history of 19 Princelet Street would give us an opportunity to put into practice the recommendations of the 2007 T.E.A.C.H. report: 'to emphasise the multiple narratives, the similarities as well as differences, and most importantly that people share a "common humanity"'.<sup>9</sup> We were also intrigued by the potential offered in the work of the Museum for exploring issues of heritage and identity. As Bernard Crick concluded about the Museum's use of the building as a way in to exploring these complex ideas, 'every schoolchild in England should see this.'<sup>10</sup>

Figure 2: Agar's 1560 map of Spitalfields<sup>12</sup>



## Developing an enquiry question

In terms of formulating an enquiry, 19 Princelet Street offers myriad possibilities. Traces of the past evident within the building itself, along with contemporaneous sources from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, would make for an engaging evidential enquiry, much like teachers Bates, Herrity and McFahn did with their pupils in their enquiry exploring the local history of Hampshire.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, perhaps most interestingly, the current usage of the building as a Museum of Immigration and Diversity and the displays located within it could have formed the basis of a fruitful enquiry on historical interpretations. Wrenn's work on the exploration of First World War memorials as interpretations is in many ways apposite, particularly the awareness he sought to instil in his pupils of what he calls the 'dynamic synthesis' of the building as an interpretation itself and the pre-existing views pupils themselves hold towards it.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 3: Overview of the enquiry

Lesson	Objectives	Main activities
1. What were the stories of the Huguenots?	Analyse the nature and extent of diversity in the stories of Huguenot migrants.	Time-line of 19 Princelet Street. Group source work and inference grids.
2. How did the synagogue change the story of 19 Princelet Street?	Analyse the nature of the impact of the synagogue on 19 Princelet Street.  Evaluate the extent to which the story of 19 Princelet Street changed.	Source investigation using 1901 census, images and oral histories.  Comparative table comparing house in 1741 and 1901 to identify similarities and differences.
3. What is the story of Brick Lane in the twentieth century?	Identify and describe changing migration patterns in the Brick Lane area.  Construct 'the' story of Brick Lane in the twentieth century.	Group work: pupils use character cards to graph according to experience, time and community.  Class time-line – pupils map experiences on to a large happy/sad graph of Brick Lane.
4. What is the story of 19 Princelet Street today?	Analyse the interpretation of the Museum of Immigration and Diversity's exhibition 'Suitcases and Sanctuary'.  Construct different narratives of migration and the stories of 19 Princelet Street.	Class discussion of the importance of family history in their own identity.  Group work: pupils' stories are contrasted with the stories told in the 'Suitcases and Sanctuary' exhibition.
5: What is the story of 19 Princelet Street and how is it a story of Britain?	Construct multiple narratives of the history of the house and its occupants	Debate, using argument cards: 19 Princelet Street: a story of Britain?

Although either of these lines of enquiry would have been rewarding, ultimately we decided to make the concepts of diversity and change and continuity the conceptual focus of the enquiry. The building at 19 Princelet Street powerfully evokes a sense of being what the Cultural Geographer Crange has labelled a *'time-thickened place'*: it is undoubtedly one of those 'places [that] provide an anchor of shared experiences between people and continuity over time. They have a past and a future that binds people together around them.'<sup>14</sup> If we wanted pupils to understand the building as a place and not just a space, it would be necessary for pupils to explore the diversity of the lives of those who called 19 Princelet Street home. Like Black I hoped to reveal the dynamic nature of diversity through the changing relationship between the building and its 'people': '...difference and therefore diversity is a product of an "enacted, lived identity" which changes over time and is susceptible to "shifting contexts and circumstances".'<sup>15</sup> We wanted to develop an enquiry which would encourage pupils to see and appreciate the complexity of the multiple, interwoven stories of the building. I also hoped that the rich, nuanced differences between the lives of the building's occupants – their place of origin, class, occupations and culture – as well as the changing fabric of the building itself, would provide a window into bigger stories, of the diverse patterns of migration in the surrounding Spitalfields area, and of how the different stories of migrant

communities intersected with the more traditional narratives of British history pupils had already studied.<sup>16</sup>

In this way, the goals of the enquiry echoed those of Whitburn and Yemoh, who have argued that when tackling the vacuum of teaching of Black British history in the post-1945 context, pupils should be encouraged to deal with the contradictions and complexities of the past. By telling the story of the building's diverse history (and of migration in Britain), over a 300-year timespan we also wanted to challenge pupils' perceptions of migration as a recent phenomenon, as revealed unwittingly by a pupil in Whitburn and Yemoh's study: '...The whole of London is [now] full of different cultures. The past wasn't like that.'<sup>17</sup>

Having decided to make diversity the main conceptual focus, we crafted our enquiry question: 'What is the story of 19 Princelet Street and how is it a story of Britain?' We decided to teach this mini-enquiry of four lessons at the end of Year 9 (Figure 3). Pupils had just examined the impact of the Second World War on Britain, Europe and the World, and as part of the enquiry had explored de-colonisation. This meant that they already a foundation of substantive knowledge of national and international political narratives when they began the enquiry, which I hoped they would be able to situate the new narratives, (of the house, its inhabitants, the community) within.

## Lesson 1: What were the stories of the Huguenots?

The first lesson in the enquiry introduced the arrival of the Huguenots. Before delving into the stories of the individuals who first called the house home, however, it was necessary to root the history of the building in its wider historical context. Wealthy Huguenot silk merchants, businessmen, lawyers and artisans and less economically mobile weavers descended on London from France in their thousands in the decades following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.<sup>18</sup> Weavers worked with flowers by the window-side, accompanied by the song of canaries. Parliament encouraged integration: the 1708 Foreign and Protestant Naturalisation Act was controversial but would help families like the Ogiers (some of the house's earliest inhabitants) who were keen to swear their allegiance to the king and so get on in London. The Huguenots' religious zeal spread quickly across Spitalfields. Rocque's 1746 survey of London details two French chapels within throwing distance of 19 Princelet Street – one at the corner of Church Street and Brick Lane and one on Brown Street. As contemporary maps and documents show, there were also many sumptuous homes in the Princelet (then Princes) Street environs in the eighteenth century, and many wonderful gardens, where ad hoc societies flourished.<sup>19</sup> Inside 19 Princelet Street itself there are still many clues to the building's former grandeur: a niche decorative fireplace, wood panelling, a 1720s stone sink in the kitchen, high ceilings, elegant windows. A grand house indeed, and whispers of a seemingly idyllic narrative.<sup>20</sup>

But look upwards. Weavers were often squashed into attic apartments designed to make them work all the hours of the day. Suddenly 'the' story of the house is not as simple. Is the story of 19 Princelet Street a story of silks and fashion, prosperity, of culture, a story of the workers?<sup>21</sup> The remnants of Huguenot buildings in the area help to create a sense of place of eighteenth-century London, but what sort of place was this? Can we even talk about 'the' story of 19 Princelet Street?

We wanted pupils to see the depth and complexity of diversity lurking in the many different stories suggested by the house and its environs. Yet at the same time, if they were to construct any kind of meaningful and coherent narrative, they also needed to see commonalities. Yet we struggled to include an evaluation of typicality for the Huguenots: the more we read the more it began to seem unhelpful even to talk about the Huguenots as a single group. Many weavers were impoverished labourers, dependent during hard times on the soup kitchens of the French missions. By contrast, the family of Peter Abraham, an Ogier, was wealthy and thrived, and London society soon developed a hunger for their rich French silks. The attitude of the Huguenots towards their new home country balanced self-confident pride and thoughtful integration. The resistance to Chartism among the weavers was at least in part due to their sense of loyalty to one another and their Huguenot community. Other stories speak of a reluctance to mix with the English, a longing to return home, a resistance to any sense of a national identity.<sup>22</sup> And yet we do know that in 1745, Peter Abraham Ogier, our resident at 19, and many of his fellow Huguenot Silk merchants, wrote in passionate defence of the king and nation to the *London*

*Gazette*. There was also an ambiguity in the attitudes shown towards the Huguenots: they were both welcoming and wary of them. Negative attitudes towards the French at the time, combined with concerns over the economic impact of the Huguenot weavers' advanced techniques, were manifested in insults and physical attacks. The Huguenots were derided by some, even by those in Parliament, as 'Frogs' as well as for their 'Clogs'. The poorest weavers' diet was also a subject of attack: their 'offal' of a diet of onions, garlic, cabbages and roots rendered stinking in the open drains. Thus even within 'one' story lurked many stories.<sup>23</sup>

To help pupils identify and describe the nature of diversity in the Huguenots' experiences, they were given a number of contemporary sources, which they used to complete an inference grid (Figure 4). One such source was Hogarth's *Noon* (Figure 5), an ambivalent picture in which the English (visible on the left) contrast with the well-dressed Huguenot church-goers. The inference grid activity provoked a fascinating range of responses from pupils, with many identifying differences not just in the lived experiences of the migrants but in their attitudes and the attitudes shown towards them. Yet in trying to fit these particular migrants' stories into their own pre-existing views of migrants' experiences, the Huguenots' stories left many pupils puzzled. In some ways they seemed to conform to pupils' views of a typical 'migrant experience' and yet in other ways the stories were unexpected, their experiences difficult to pin down and characterise. The resulting cognitive conflict was shown in pupils' questions: 'Why would they fight?' 'Were they divided?' 'Why would they have come to England?' 'What would they have needed?'

## Lesson 2: How did the synagogue change the story of 19 Princelet Street?

Myriad stories are hinted at in 19 Princelet Street from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. Showing pupils the Ordnance Survey map of 1896 revealed this in a striking way: the two Huguenot chapels of (now) Fournier Street and Hanbury Street had been taken over by Methodists (Figure 6). The poverty of the area is implied by the existence of a soup kitchen off Brick Lane, and, most significantly for our story, 19 Princelet Street was now home to a synagogue.

In 1869 a synagogue was built in the back garden of the house, with a meeting room dug out underneath. By this time the Huguenot community had long gone.<sup>24</sup> By 1870 the synagogue's membership had grown to 120; religious worship, marriage and vitality were brought back once more to the building. On Saturdays and holy days the congregation flowed through the entrance hall; in the 1880s there were up to nine weddings a day.

Clues to its past as a synagogue are hinted at today from the exterior of the building itself – the nineteenth-century large rounded windows and doors: more light, space, suggesting a public function (Figure 7). A number of more evocative images present themselves as you enter the front door – the worn Victorian steps and tap for washing prior to worship at the top of the stairs by the ladies' gallery. Your eye however

Figure 4: Examples of inference grids completed by pupils

Traces of the Huguenots	Inferences made by pupils	Pupils questions
Hogarth (1736)	Huguenots vs sinners: a divide. Contrast. Diversity: different classes, races. Exaggeration. Huguenots looking down on the Londoners? Huguenots are better behaved.	Were the Huguenots welcomed? Why are the English portrayed so badly? Is it only the Huguenots that go to Church? Why are the Huguenots and English in the same street? Why has he exaggerated the two sides? Whose side is the artist on? Why are they separated? What do the older (established) immigrants think about the newer ones? Why was their silk trade so popular?
<i>London Gazette</i> (1745)	Powerful. Thought of themselves as English and not French? Decadent. Helped to defend Britain. Struggling to fit in and general acceptance. Internal class structure. Confident and loyal. Well-respected. A hatred of Catholicism. They are becoming British. They wanted to protect the UK.	Revenge against the French and Catholics or loyalty to Britain? Were they accepted? Why help Britain? Why would they want to fight? Why so many French names?
Mayhew (1881)	Very well educated, prominent, admired. Clever. Interesting. Superior. Successful? Sophisticated. Sense of community, active. Made an impact, admired. 'The perfect humans'	Why would they come to England? What would they need? Exclusive: could the English join? Why and when were they first accepted? Why were they split into different societies? How did they earn money?

Figure 5: William Hogarth's *Noon*, from the series *The Four Times of the Day*



leads you to the light at the back of the building: the wondrous faded pinks and greens of the glass roof, cascading light on to the wood panelling, candelabra and Ark. In its heyday it would have been a lavish and vibrant place. People gave what they could to maintain the building – the Rothschilds donated 50 pounds, the Ladies' Vestment Society saved up ten shillings and sixpence. These donor names are recorded in faded gold on the walls of the synagogue. Stories of the building's past are literally written on its walls, there for the pupils to discover for themselves.

### Lesson 3: The continuity of the building as a home

Although the addition of the synagogue changed the function of 19 Princelet Street, the house itself remained a home. The 1901 Census sheds some light on a new story of Princelet Street – not only as a place of religious worship but also, as a house to the many, rather than the few. Like many grand Georgian houses in the area, 19 Princelet Street was subdivided, forming a dwelling for five families. It became a refuge to the first wave of Irish emigrants following the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s and by the 1880s, home to Jews from Poland and Russia seeking freedom and opportunity after pogroms and persecution had ripped apart their lives. For some Victorian visitors it was the apparent deterioration of the area, the poverty and lack of upkeep of buildings that were striking (Figure 8). Yet, it was these very conditions that also provided opportunity for new migrants and led to a cultural vitality in the area of a different kind to that of the eighteenth century. For example Myer Reback was

the ‘shammas’ at 19 Princelet Street from 1913 to 1961. His family’s experiences echo the dual history of the building in this era – both as a domestic and public space. A refugee from the pogroms of Russia, his family lived in cramped conditions. His wife and five daughters all slept in one second-floor bedroom; his son had the sofa bed in the kitchen. His daughter Esther remembers tasting her father’s kosher wine, taking Hebrew lessons at a nearby school, ritually dusting the synagogue and playing outside in Princelet Street. She was also witness to the Moseley marchers in the 1930s. Indeed, before the infamous ‘battle’ of nearby Cable Street in 1936,<sup>25</sup> the basement of 19 Princelet Street became a meeting place for anti-fascists against Moseley’s blackshirts.<sup>26</sup>

Although there was seemingly a stark contrast between the lives of migrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and those of the early Huguenot settlers of the eighteenth century we wanted pupils to look more closely, to see the subtle similarities in their experiences. Here we borrowed an activity from the enquiry on Chepstow Castle in the textbook *Medieval Minds*.<sup>27</sup> Pupils used contemporary sources to help them complete a comparative table recording the changing usage of the building between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## Lesson 4: What is the story of 19 Princelet Street today?

The story of 19 Princelet Street today is still intertwined with that of the local community. On the corner of Fournier Street and Brick Lane, on the site of what was originally an eighteenth-century French Protestant chapel, now lies a vibrant Bengali mosque (Figure 9). That building has also, in its time, been home to a Methodist mission and the Great Spitalfields Synagogue.

After the Second World War, the Jewish community in the area declined, and 19 Princelet Street and its synagogue fell into a state of disuse.<sup>28</sup> It became a sometime home to performance groups play groups, and English classes for the new Bengali community. From 1971, following the Indian declaration of independence and subsequent War of Liberation in Bangladesh, the Spitalfields area increasingly became home to a new migrant community of Bangladeshis, not only attracted by economic opportunities but also fleeing the ravages of conflict. Brick Lane is now known to some as Bangla Town, such is the preponderance of Bangladeshi shops and of course curry houses. The dynamic of 19 Princelet Street also continues. The building is now home to The Museum of Immigration and Diversity, which aims to use the different uses and inhabitants of the building to reveal stories that cross social, economic and cultural divides, and houses an insightful and moving exhibition ‘Suitcases and Sanctuary’ (Figure 10). This use of suitcases is echoed, to my mind, in the work of Mohamud and Whitburn in teaching the history of British Somali communities.<sup>29</sup> Local primary pupils worked with museum educators to produce touching displays of the migrant groups the building and surrounding area have been home to. Significantly, pupils were asked to explore a migrant community different to their own. Tea-stained letters, battered suitcases and muffled, crackling interviews tell

Figure 6: OS map from 1896<sup>31</sup>



Figure 7: The synagogue at 19 Princelet Street Local Young Museum-Makers, at work in the Victorian synagogue at 19 Princelet Street.



Photo credit: Tom Lindsey/19 Princelet Street

the colourful stories of migrants from the Irish, Caribbean, Somalian and Bengali communities, as well as of earlier Huguenot and Jewish arrivals. The project has had such an impact that some primary school pupils became volunteers for the museum: ‘I just love this place. My friends didn’t understand why until I brought them here. Then they said, “This is amazing, this is incredible – we had no idea it existed.” This place changes people.’<sup>30</sup> This exemplifies

Figure 8: Victorian commentary on Brick Lane, written in 1889

'Brick Lane..black and noisome, the road sticky with slime and palsied houses, rotten from chimney to cellar, leaning together, apparently held by their ingrained corruption. Dark, silent, uneasy shadows passing and crossing - human vermin in this reeking sink, like goblin exhalations from all that is noxious around. Women with sunken, black-rimmed eyes, whose faces appear and vanish by the light of an occasional gas-lamp, and look like ill-covered skulls that we startle at their stare.'

Arthur Morrison, *Palace Journal*, 24 April 1889 cit., Lichtenstein, R., (2008) *On Brick Lane* Penguin; London

Figure 9: The mosque at the corner of Fournier Street and Brick Lane.



how the Museum seeks to make connections between past and present, as well as between local stories and the history of London and wider global issues of human migration and globalisation.

In order to make sense of 19 Prinzelet Street, I needed to help pupils to understand the context of changing migration patterns in the Brick Lane area in the twentieth century. We found Rachel Lichtenstein's book *On Brick Lane* and resources from Tower Hamlets Council helpful sources of information, from which we devised an activity based on a society line and a happy/sad graph (Figure 11).<sup>32</sup> Migration trends were drawn out through a narrative structure: character cards were placed on the graphs by pupils, who had each taken ownership of a particular individual's story. The activity was designed to help pupils identify key developments in the history of the neighbourhood: the clash between Irish and Jewish communities with the Fascists in the 1930s; the impact of the Second World War; the decline of the Jewish community after the war; as well as the influx of Bengali and other Asian communities in the 1960s and 1970s and the racism with which they were initially confronted. The activity also explored the changing economic conditions of the area – now very prosperous for some – and the changing religious and cultural composition of Brick Lane. Clips from news programmes established useful links between the building and a wider history of migration in Britain.<sup>33</sup> We then asked pupils to consider and characterise the type

of experience of each of the migrants they had studied. Although many found that patterns were diffuse and hard to discern, nevertheless comments made in class discussion suggested that at least some pupils were beginning to discern patterns and therefore implicitly to construct narratives. While some pupils sought to construct a single narrative (for example one pupil suggested that the 1930s and 1970s had been an unpleasant time because of racial violence, but that, in a positive way, the different communities had drawn together to fight fascism and another commented that '...the story of Brick Lane is all about immigration. All through the years, it has been different cultures, societies, personalities and ideas that have shaped who we are today, why we are here and how we act.') For others, the story of Brick Lane was 'complicated'. This suggests that a few pupils were beginning to recognise that even within a highly localised and time bounded context, multiple narratives could exist alongside one another.

## Impacts and future planning

The enquiry was complex and demanding to teach. Like Sheldrake and Banham, we were convinced that stories of migration needed to be set within a both a broad and deep historical context.<sup>34</sup> However, in trying to contextualise the myriad stories of the building for pupils, we hit complications. We had hoped to use the enquiry as a way of getting pupils to explore their own family histories and to think about how these stories might intersect with the history of the local neighbourhood they had learned in the enquiry. This threw up some fascinating stories – from Jewish émigrés from 1930s Germany, to connections with Ghana, China and South Africa. Interestingly, some pupils felt they didn't have any 'story' to tell, but their own family histories revealed a lot about post-war migration out of London. While pupils were fascinated by the family histories of others in the class, subsequent discussions about identity were more problematic. One pupil asked: 'do you mean identity or ancestry? I don't think the two are the same.' Some related identity to their family history, others to their friends, their interests, their locality, their country (Figure 12). What we had thought would be an interesting way in to a discussion over identity quite rightly fell short – the question is too diffuse, dynamic and personal. Having said that, it was clear that we had ignited pupils' interest, echoing the recommendations of the T.E.A.C.H. report in the sense that: '...teaching emotional and controversial history is best done when the pupils consider their own loyalties, their multiple interests and identities.'<sup>35</sup>

The enquiry provided an excellent opportunity for pupils to ponder stories of migration in British history, and how these stories intersected with broader political, social and economic narratives. However, the broader history of migration in Britain needed to be taught in more depth and given more time to make those discussions more robust and fruitful. In particular, in light of feedback from the museum, who have been hugely supportive in helping us plan the scheme of work, it is clear that we did not place sufficient emphasis on the history of the Bangladeshi community. It has given us a lot to consider as we re-plan this unit of teaching for next year. It is clear that we did not place sufficient emphasis on the history of the Bangladeshi community or

on the connections the Museum seeks to make with today's migrant and refugee narratives.

The house at 19 Princelet Street is a special place: not least because the opportunities it affords to reflect on the stories of individuals, communities and localities helps pupils to develop 'a sense of their own personal identity and place in the world.'<sup>36</sup> Moreover, '...as history teachers, we have a responsibility to grapple with the fundamental issues that connect our subject to pupils' lives and that give history meaning and value in terms of shaping our pupils' attitudes, values and identities.' For Monica Ali, author of the celebrated novel *Brick Lane*:

19 Princelet Street may not be part of our glorious heritage, the stuff of which national myths are made, but it is something more valuable than that. It is example of how the past can be used to illuminate and remind and caution the present. It's an example of how memory can serve as a principle of solidarity as well as critique. It enables people to gather their thoughts to the present as well as the past...it sparks the imagination and sparks conversations.<sup>37</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a more persuasive case for studying 19 Princelet Street and its stories.<sup>38</sup>

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Figure 10: The 'Suitcases and Sanctuary' exhibition at the Museum of Immigration and Diversity



Photo credit: Joel Pike/19 Princelet Street

Figure 11: Happy/sad graph

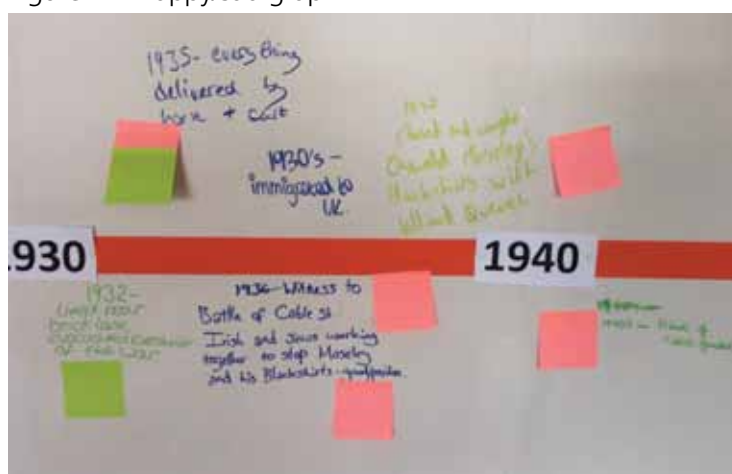


Figure 12: Pupils' views on identity and ancestry

'I think identity is formed by who I am friends with and what choices I make. It's not much to do with my family, but I do identify with where I am from.'	'I am different from my family. Members of my family are Jehovah's Witnesses but I am not, therefore my identity isn't affected by my family.'
'I view myself as English, because I was born here. My father's side are from Scotland, my mother's side are from Normandy. I still think of myself as English though'.	'My identity is more about what sort of person I am or try to be.'
'My family is from Wales originally. I have some Indonesian roots, found by my cousin who traced our family tree. Living as a child in Africa also shaped my identity'.	'I am half Cypriot and most of my relatives live in Cyprus. It has played a part in who I am. My Greek Cypriot family escaped Cyprus during the Greek Cypriot and Turkish war. Most of my relatives have a medical profession and I am interested in that too'.



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- <sup>15</sup> Black, S. (2012) 'Wrestling with diversity: exploring pupils' difficulties when arguing about a diverse past' in *Teaching History*, 146, *Teacher Knowledge Edition*, p.30.
- <sup>16</sup> Dr Kershen explores the history of Huguenot, Jewish and Bengali immigrants and their relationship to the place of Spitalfields. Kershen, A. (2005) *Strangers, Aliens and Asians: Huguenots, Jews and Bangladeshis in Spitalfields 1660-2000*, London: Routledge.
- <sup>17</sup> Whitburn, R. and Yemoh, S. (2012) "'My people struggled too": hidden histories and heroism - a school-designed post-14 course on multi-cultural Britain since 1945' in *Teaching History*, 147, *Curriculum Architecture Edition*, p.23.
- <sup>18</sup> For a useful introduction to the Huguenots and London, see Gwynn, R. (1985) 'England's First Refugees' in *History Today*, 35, Issue 5, 1985. [www.historytoday.com/robin-gwynn/englands-first-refugees](http://www.historytoday.com/robin-gwynn/englands-first-refugees) An interesting way in to the story of the Ogiers can be drawn from: Hollis, L. (2012) '19 Princelet Street: Spitalfields and the Rise and Fall of English Silk' in *Ten Stones of London: the buildings that made London*, London: Phoenix, pp. 130-61. There has been a resurgence in interest in the silks of the Huguenots of Spitalfields: [www.huguenotsofspitalfields.org/huguenot-threads-2014.html](http://www.huguenotsofspitalfields.org/huguenot-threads-2014.html)
- <sup>19</sup> Stewart, L. and Weindling, P. (1995) 'Philosophical Threads: natural philosophy and public experiment among the weavers of Spitalfields' in *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 28, No. 1, pp. 37-62.
- <sup>20</sup> Burn gives us many more examples of important Georgian buildings in London and how they might be used as a way into the eighteenth-century world: Burn, K. (2014) 'Making Sense of the Eighteenth Century' in *Teaching History*, 154, *A Sense of History Edition*, p.27.
- <sup>21</sup> The influential work of the eighteenth-century textile designer Anna Maria Garthwaite, resident of 2 Princelet Street, can be seen at the Victoria and Albert Museum: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/name/garthwaite-anna-maria/1846/>
- <sup>22</sup> Rowe, D. J. (2008) 'Chartism and the Spitalfield Silk Weavers' in *Economic History Review*, 20, No. 3, pp.482-93 ; Lachenicht, S. (2007) 'Huguenot Immigrants and the Formation of National Identities, 1548-1787' in *The Historical Journal*, 50, No.2, pp.309-33.
- <sup>23</sup> Kershen, *op. cit.*
- <sup>24</sup> In the main, this was down to the changing economic context of the silk weaving industry. Acts of Parliament designed to help the workers had the

opposite effect. See Clapham, J. H., 'The Spitalfields Acts, 1773 - 1824' in *The Economic Journal*, 26, No. 104) pp.459-71.

- <sup>25</sup> The 'Battle of Cable St' and its meaning are discussed here: Tilles, D. (2001) 'The Myth of Cable Street' in *History Today*, 61, Issue 10. <http://www.historytoday.com/daniel-tilles/myth-cable-street>; T. Kushner and N. Valman(eds) (1999) *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society*, London: Vallentine Mitchell.
- <sup>26</sup> I am very much indebted to the work of Karen Gold on the building for the TES: Gold, K. (1999) 'If walls could talk, what stories the house at No 19 would tell', *Times Educational Supplement*, Friday 23 April 1999, pp. 7-9.
- <sup>27</sup> Byrom, J., Counsell, C. and Riley, M. (1997) 'Family Fortresses: What can a castle's story tell us about medieval minds?' in *Medieval Minds: Britain 1066-1500*, London: Pearson Education, pp.12-23
- <sup>28</sup> The author Rachel Lichtenstein evokes the story of the last caretaker of 19 Princelet Street, David Rodinsky, in her work written jointly with Iain Sinclair: Lichtenstein, R. and Sinclair, I. (2000) *Rodinsky's Room*, London: Granta.
- <sup>29</sup> Whitburn, R. and Mohamud, A. (2014) 'Unpacking the suitcases and finding the history: doing justice to the teaching of diverse histories in the classroom' in *Teaching History*, 154, *A Sense of History Edition*, pp.40-46.
- <sup>30</sup> The volunteer is quoted from Feay, S., (2005) 'Talk of the Town: a Spitalfields mystery: welcome to the house of vanishing men' in *The Independent on Sunday*, 18 May 2005 [www.19princeletstreet.org.uk/press/050518IOS.html](http://www.19princeletstreet.org.uk/press/050518IOS.html)
- <sup>31</sup> Source: <http://maps.nls.uk/view/101201568>
- <sup>32</sup> Lichtenstein, R. (2007) *On Brick Lane*, London: Hamish Hamilton; Tower Hamlets Council (2012) *The Bengali East End: histories of life and work in Tower Hamlets*.
- <sup>33</sup> Bruce, A. (2013) Sky News <http://video.news.sky.com/h264/vod/700/2013/10/141013-BRUCE-IPAD-4F-IMMIGRATION.mp4>; Cruikshank, D. (2010) BBC London News [http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/london/hi/people\\_and\\_places/history/newsid\\_8471000/8471025.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/london/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_8471000/8471025.stm)
- <sup>34</sup> Sheldrake, R. and Banham, D. (2007) 'Seeing a different picture: exploring migration through the lens of history' in *Teaching History*, 127, *Sense and Sensitivity Edition*, pp. 39-47.
- <sup>35</sup> The Historical Association, *op. cit.*, p.7.
- <sup>36</sup> The Historical Association, *op. cit.*, p.8.
- <sup>37</sup> Ali, M. (2011) '19 Princelet St, The Museum of Immigration' at the Royal Academy. This podcast can be listened to on i-Tunes. Ali M. (2003) *Brick Lane*, London: Doubleday. Raphael Samuel picks up on this point well: Samuel, R. (1998) *Island Stories: unravelling Britain, Theatres of Memory, Volume II*, London: Verso.
- <sup>38</sup> See: [www.19princeletstreet.org.uk/groupVisits.html](http://www.19princeletstreet.org.uk/groupVisits.html) to organise a group visit.

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