**Whitechapel’s History**

Where is *“Whitechapel”*?

Whitechapel is a district in the *Borough of Tower Hamlets,* East London.



What is its history?

* Whitechapel was named after a chapel-of-ease (a church which is not the parish church) which already existed in 1329. In about 1338, it became the parish church of Whitechapel, called St Mary Matfelon.
* By 1840, eight years after *Oliver Twist* was published, *Whitechapel* faced overcrowding because of the immigration of country people fleeing poverty.
* It was the site of the *“Jack the Ripper Killings”* (The Whitechapel Murders) between 1888-91.

How many people lived there, and what did they do for a living?

* According to an estimate of 1889, the total population was 73, 518 with 39.20% below the “Line of Poverty”.
* There were few chances for people to find legal jobs, as there was no industry. It was inhabited by the very poor, and filled with criminals.
* Outsiders described its people as “Vermin whose trade was robbery, and whose recreation was murder.”

What sort of neighbourhood was it?

* Whitechapel had large populations of Irish (Traditionally poor, country people fleeing poverty and famine in Ireland. Hundreds of thousands of Irish died of hunger at this time, possibly millions) and Jewish immigrants (often involved in money lending and pawnbroking. In many countries they were not allowed to own land).
* Dickens frequently used the district in his books. It features in *The Pickwick Papers,* and in *Oliver Twist,* Fagin and his thieves live there. When Fagin goes to visit Sikes to discuss the Chertsey Burglary, it says that he goes from Whitechapel, north through Spitalfields to Bethnal Green. These are all real locations in the “Borough of Tower Hamlets” region of London.