Introduction

Sir Frederick Treves (1853–1923)

Frederick Treves was born in Dorchester in 1853. His father William was a cabinet maker and upholsterer. He was educated at the Merchant Taylors’ School and the London Hospital Medical College where he qualified in 1875. He became a House Surgeon and then Assistant Surgeon to the hospital by 1879. As well as a talented surgeon, Treves was a keen sportsman and was instrumental in establishing the Clubs Union at the Medical College. He published many important works on surgery and anatomy pioneered the operation to remove the appendix. He served in the Boer War with his own surgical unit and famously operated on Edward VII before his coronation. He retired in 1908 and wrote popular travel literature as well as his reminiscences of Joseph published shortly before his death in 1923.

Joseph Carey Merrick (1862–1890)

Joseph was born in Leicester in 1862. His mother and father ran a haberdashery shop. His younger brother, William died aged 4 and his mother died when Joseph was only 10. He went to school until aged 13 and worked until his deformities made this impossible. After time in the workhouse, Joseph became part of a travelling freak show in 1884. Shortly after his first encounter with Frederick Treves, Joseph was forced to work in Europe. In 1886 Joseph returned to London, destitute, having been robbed of his savings. He was taken in by the hospital and remained a resident there until his death in 1890. His skeleton was preserved by the Medical College under the terms of the Anatomy Act for the benefit of medical science.

Eva C E Lückes (1854–1919)

Eva Lückes was born into an upper-middle-class family in 1854. She began her nursing career in 1876 at the Middlesex Hospital and completed her training at Westminster Hospital in 1878. After appointments at The London Hospital, Manchester General Hospital and Great Ormond Street she was successful in applying for the position of Matron to The London Hospital at the age of just 26. She immediately set about introducing reforms to improve the standard of nursing at the hospital. Probationer nurses were expected to complete two years of training with another year following the examination. Eva Lückes established the Private Nursing Institution in 1885, the Preliminary Training School in 1889, and ensured that the nursing staff were provided with improved accommodation. She remained as Matron even through ill health until her death in 1919.
We begin our journey in 1884, in the heart of Victorian Whitechapel. A young London Hospital surgeon, Frederick Treves, is informed of a curious exhibit in a former shop at what is now 259 Whitechapel Road. This chance encounter would alter his life forever and that of Joseph Carey Merrick, ‘The Elephant Man’.

Joseph was born in Leicester in 1862. His early life was filled with tragedy and hardship. He spent time in the workhouse in Leicester before joining a travelling freak show which brought him to the East End of London.

Frederick Treves had been a student at The London Hospital Medical College in the 1870s and was a rising star in the medical profession, destined for greatness.

**Direction:** cross over Whitechapel Road at the pedestrian crossing and turn left down Turner Street. Stop when you reach the Garrod Building, part of Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry. You may enter the building during opening hours.

By 1886, Joseph was destitute and, having made his way back to London from Europe, he arrived at Liverpool Street Station where an excited and curious crowd gathered. Treves was called by the police as fortunately Joseph was still carrying Treves’ calling card. At the behest of Treves and the London Hospital Chairman, Francis Carr-Gomm, Joseph was admitted as an in-patient.

**Direction:** pass along the front of the old hospital until you reach East Mount Street. Follow signs for the main entrance to the hospital. On occasions he was taken to the countryside and also the theatre. His relationship with Frederick Treves became much closer; Treves grew to understand Joseph as a person rather than a patient and his visitors included notable members of society such as the actress Madame Kendal and even royalty.

**Direction:** Enter the hospital through the main entrance and continue past a café area. Pass through the long corridor and turn left into the atrium where you can see the London Hospital bell of 1757. Go back into the reception area and exit the building. Cross Stepney Way and continue until you reach the statue of Queen Alexandra.

In 1887, the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) and Princess Alexandra (opposite) visited the hospital to open the Medical College building and nurses’ home. Alexandra paid a visit to Joseph which touched him deeply.

This statue also features a relief which shows the Finsen Light department (bottom right), made possible by Princess Alexandra who acquired the first Finsen lamp for the hospital in 1900. She became the hospital’s President in 1904. In 1902, shortly before Edward VII was to be crowned, he was diagnosed with appendicitis. Treves performed the very risky operation which saved the King’s life.

**Direction:** Continue past the statue up to Newark Street and turn right. Continue along Newark Street until you reach the entrance to the Royal London Hospital Museum.

We end our journey at the former church of St Philip with St Augustine. The building is now the Medical Library and has been extensively restored. The church was completed in 1892 shortly after Joseph’s death.

The museum is located in the crypt at the eastern end of the church and tells the story of the Royal London Hospital and the development of medicine in the East End.

Joseph Merrick is featured in the display amongst many fascinating objects connected to this story. You will learn more about the history of the hospital and healthcare in the East End.

**Direction:** If the museum is open then continue through the gate and down the ramp to the entrance.